The Yotsuya Kwaidan or Lady iwa Inari

Written by Tsuruya Nanboku IV in 1825

Translated by James S. De Benneville in 1917

Edited and further translated by Tinyel in June 2026

Preface

Tales of the Tokugawa can well be introduced by two "wonder-stories" of Nippon. One of these, the Yotsuya Kwaidan, is presented in the present volume, not so much because of the incidents involved and the peculiar relation to a phase of Nipponese mentality, as from the fact that it contains all the machinery of the Nipponese ghost story. From this point of view the reading of one of these tales disposes of a whole class of the native literature. Difference of detail is found. But unless the tale carries some particular interest, as of curious illustration of customs or history—the excuse for a second presentation—a long course of such reading becomes more than monotonous. It is unprofitable. Curiously enough, it can be said that most Nipponese ghost stories are true. When a sword is found enshrined, itself the malevolent influence—as is the Muramasa blade of the Hamamatsu Suwa Jinja, the subject of the Komatsu Onryū of Matsubayashi Hakuchi—and with such tradition attached to it, it is difficult to deny a basis of fact attaching to the tradition. The ghost story becomes merely an elaboration of an event that powerfully impressed the men of the day and place. Moreover this naturalistic

element can be detected in the stories themselves. Nipponese writers of to-day explain most of them by the word *shinkei*—"nerves"; the working of a guilty conscience moulding succeeding events, and interpreting the results to the subsequent disaster involved. The explanation is somewhat at variance with the native Shintō doctrine of the moral perfection of the Nipponese, and its maxim—follow the dictates of one's heart; but that is not our present concern.

Their theory, however, finds powerful support in the nature of the Nipponese ghost. The Buddhist ghost does not remain on earth. It has its travels and penalties to go through in the nether world, or its residence in Paradise, before it begins a new life—somewhere. The Shintō ghost, in the vagueness of Shintō theology, does remain on earth. If of enough importance it is enshrined, and rarely goes abroad, except when carried in procession at the time of the temple festival. Otherwise it finds its home in the miniature shrine of the *kami-dana* or god-shelf. There is a curious confusion of Nipponese thought on this subject; at least among the mass of laity. At the Bon-Matsuri the dead revisit the scene of their earthly

sojourn for the space of three days; and yet the worship of the *ihai*, or mortuary tablets, the food offerings with ringing of the bell to call the attention of the resident Spirit is a daily rite at the household Buddhist shrine (Butsudan). When, therefore, the ghost does not conform to these well-regulated habits, it is because it is an unhappy ghost. It is then the *O'Baké* or *Bakémono*, the haunting ghost. Either it has become an unworshipped spirit, or, owing to some atrocious injury in life, it stays to wander the earth, and to secure vengeance on the living perpetrator. In most cases this is effected by the grudge felt or spoken at the last moment of life. The mind, concentrated in its hate and malice at this final crisis, secures to the Spirit a continued and unhappy sojourn among the living, until the vengeance be secured, the grudge satisfied, and the Spirit pacified. There are other unhappy conditions of this revisiting of life's scenes; as when the dead mother returns to nurse her infant, or the dead mistress to console a lover. In the latter case, at least, the expressed affection has a malignant effect, perhaps purpose—as in the Bōtan Dōrō of Sanyūtei Enchō, a writer most careful in observing all the niceties called for by the subject.

In the Nipponese ghost story the vengeful power of the ghost acts through entirely natural means. The characters involved suffer through their own delusions aroused by conscience. In the old days, and among the common people in Nippon to-day, the supernatural was and is believed in, with but few exceptions. Such stories still are held to be fact, albeit the explanation is modern. Hence it can be said that the "Yotsuya Kwaidan" is a true story. O'Iwa, the Lady of Tamiya, really did exist in the Genroku and Hōrei periods (1688-1710); just ante-dating the reforming rule of the eighth Tokugawa Shōgun, Yoshimune Kō. Victim of an atrocious plot of her husband and others, she committed suicide with the vow to visit her rage upon all engaged in the conspiracy. The shrine of the O'Iwa Inari (Fox-witched O'Iwa) in Yotsuya was early erected (1717) to propitiate her wrathful ghost; and the shrines of Nippon, to the shabbiest and meanest, have their definite record. On the register the name of the husband appears as Ibei; "probably correct," as Mr. Momogawa tells us. With him the name of Iémon is retained in the present story. Iémon is the classic example of the wicked and brutal husband, on the stage and in the *gidayu* recitation of Nippon. There was but little reason to revert to the record. The

shrine always prospered. It appears on the maps of the district as late as Ansei fourth year (1857); and the writer has had described to him by a friend a visit to this shrine some twenty years ago. The lady in question referred to it rather vaguely as beyond Samegafuchi: *i.e.*, at Yotsuya Samonchō. It was particularly favoured by the hair dressers, and to the eyes of a young girl was a gorgeous structure in its continually renewed decoration. Inquiry of late in the district elicited the information that the shrine had been removed. Many changes have been made on the southern side of Yotsuya by the passage of the railway from Iidamachi to Shinjuku. The Myōgyōji, with other temples there located, has been swept away. In fact the Meiji period handled all those institutions established by deceased piety with great roughness. Teramachi—Temple Street—is now but a name. The temples of eastern Yotsuya have nearly all disappeared. Have public institutions occupied this "public land"? Of course: the sites were sold for the secular purpose of profit, and poverty spread wide and fast over them. Yotsuya got the shell of this oyster.

About the middle of Meiji therefore (say 1893) the shrine disappeared from Yotsuya Samonchō; to be re-erected in Echizenbori near the Sumidagawa. Local inquiry could or would give but little information. A fortunate encounter at the Denzu-In with an University student, likewise bent on hunting out the old sites of Edo's history, set matters right. Subsequent visits to the newer shrine were not uninteresting, though the presence of the mirror of O'Iwa and of the bamboo tube inclosing her Spirit (Mr. Momogawa) was strenuously denied by the incumbent. In the presence of the very genuine worship at the lady's shrine much stress need not be laid on the absence.

The present story practically is based on the "Yotsuya Kwaidan" of Shunkintei Ryuō, a famous story-teller of the Yoshiwara, and an old man when the "Restoration" of the Meiji period occurred. The sketch given in the "O'Iwa Inari Yūrei" of Momogawa Jakuen filled in gaps, and gave much suggestion in moulding the story into a consistent whole. Parts merely sketched by the older story-teller found completeness. This collection of ghost stories—the "Kwaidan Hyaku Monogatari" published by the Kokkwadō—is in the

main written by Mr. Momogawa, and can be recommended as one of the best of these collections, covering in shorter form the more important stories of this class of the native literature. The "Yotsuya Kwaidan" of Shinsai Tōyō, one of the older and livelier of the *kōdan* lecturers, gives the scene at the house of Chōbei, and his quarrel with Toémon. It is found in the "Kwaidan-Shū" published by the Hakubun-kwan. The *gidayu* (heroic recitation) and the drama handle all these stories for their own peculiar purposes. The incidents of a tale are so distorted, for stage use and dramatic effect, as to make these literary forms of small avail. The letter of O'Hana, however, is practically that of the play of Tsuruya Namboku (Katsu Byōzō). It has been thought well to append to the story the *gidayu* of this writer, covering the scene in Iémon's house. Also the strange experience of the famous actor Kikugorō, third of that name, is put into English for the curious reader. Kikugorō was the pioneer in the representation of the Namboku drama.

This life history of the O'Iwa Inari—the moving cause of the establishment of her shrine—is no mere ghost story. It is a very curious exposition of life in Edo among a class of officials entirely different from the

fighting *samurai* who haunted the fencing schools of Edo; from the men higher up in social status, who risked heads, or rather bellies, in the politics of the day and the struggle to obtain position, which meant power, in the palace clique. These latter were men who sought to have a share in the government of the Shōgun's person, and hence of the nation. They strove to seat themselves in the high posts of the palace. Here was a rapidly revolving wheel to which a man must cling, or be dashed to pieces. To prevent being shoved off into destruction they used every means of slander and intrigue, and fought against such, that the life of a rich and luxurious court afforded. The result, too often, was the present of a dagger from the suzerain they sought to please. Trapped into some breach of the harsh discipline, or even of mere form of etiquette, the gift was "respectfully received" with the mocking face of gratitude, even from the hand of the successful rival in office. At his home the defeated politician cut his belly open. His obedience to the suzerain's will was duly reported. His family was ruined or reprieved according to a capricious estimation of its power of resentment—and it became a question of "who next?" to try for a place on the wheel. On the contrary those lower officials, engaged

in the dull routine of bureaucratic office, had a much less dangerous service and etiquette to deal with. In insignificant ease they lived and intrigued in their petty way, under no obligation to take sides in the politics of the truly great. If they fell, it was largely their own fault. Such was the position of those in immediate contact with the working wheels of the Shōgun's Government. The great *bugyō* (magistrates) were continually shifting. Their court staff was the solid foundation of unyielding precedent in form. The one was a court officer; the others court officers.

Hence the Kwaidan possesses value for the social lesson it conveys. The admittance of a stranger to the neighborhood, his evil bond with the Lady of Tamiya, the previous passion for O'Hana and thereby the entanglement of Kwaiba in the plot; all form a network in which the horror of the story is balanced by the useful lessons to be drawn by the mind of Nippon from its wickedness. Perhaps this belief in the effect of the curse of the suicide acts both in deterring or bringing back the erring husband, and in saving the wife from the extremities of her despair in abandonment. The story of O'Iwa, the belief in her power, to-day has a strong influence on a certain class

of the Nipponese mind; especially among the women. If the present writer might have felt momentarily an amused feeling at sight of her worshippers, it was quickly lost at sight of the positive unhappiness expressed in these faces of the abandoned. A visit to the Tamiya Inari is not necessarily either one of idle curiosity or without results. Some exceedingly painful impressions can be brought away in the mind.

It is not entirely in jest therefore that apology is made for the reproduction of the story. It is well in such matters to follow one's predecessors. Moreover, public sentiment is not to be derided nor disregarded. It has a certain title to respect, even when superstition is involved. Hence the statement can be made, that in telling this story of the "Yotsuya Kwaidan" no derogatory motive is involved—to people, class, or person; least of all in reference to the dread Lady of Tamiya.

Omarudani—4th July, 1916.

PROEM

Reader, pray take not the story of the Lady Iwa Inari, the Yotsuya Kwaidan, as a mere fairy tale or novel of the day. The shrine of the Tamiya Inari stands now to attest the truth of the tradition. Let the doubter but witness the faith of the believer in the powers of the fearful lady; and, if doubt still continues to exist, the salutary fear of others at least will inspire respect.

CHAPTER 0: Some Geography

Yotsuya is a suburb — at the extreme west of Edo-Tōkyō. Its streets are narrow and winding, though hilly withal; especially on the southern edge toward the Aoyama district, still devoted to cemeteries and palaces, sepulchres whited without and within. Echizenbori would be at the other extremity of the great city. It fronts eastward on the bank of the

Sumidagawa. The populous and now poverty stricken districts of Honjō and Fukagawa beyond the wide stream, with other qualities, deprive it of any claim of going to extremes. In fact Echizenbori is a very staid and solid section of Edo-Tōkyō. Its streets are narrow; and many are the small shops to purvey for the daily needs of its inhabitants. But these rows of shops are sandwiched in between great clumps of stores, partly warehouses and partly

residences of the owners thereof. These stores line the canals of Echizenbori, water courses crowded with junks carrying their ten tons, or their hundreds of tons, of freight — precious cargoes of rice to go into these stores in bulk, of soy, by the hundred kegs, of charcoal by the thousand bales, of fish dried and fresh, of raddish pickled in salt and rice bran, of all the odds and ends of material in the gross which go to make up the necessities of

living in a great city. If Echizenbori then can make its show of poverty, and very little display of wealth, it is not one of the poor quarters of this capital city of Nippon.

Crossing the Takabashi from Hachōbori and plunging down the narrow street opposite; a short turn to the right, a plunge down another narrow street and a turn to the right; one comes to the high cement wall, in its modernness of type a most

unusual attachment to shrine or temple. The gate is narrow and formal; almost like the entrance to a garden or smaller burying ground. Within all is changed from the busy outside world. The area inclosed is small — perhaps a square of a hundred and fifty feet — but marked in lines by a maze of lanterns of the cheap iron variety, set on cheap wooden posts. On the right is seen a minor shrine or two dedicated to the Inari goddess. On the left is a small

building devoted to votive offerings, the crude and the more elaborate. The most striking is the offering of a little geisha lady, and portrays an heroic scene of early days. There are other portraitures, in which perhaps a wandering lover is seen as a hero, to the lady's eyes, of these later times. On the outside of the structure are posted up by the hundred pictures of once woebegone ladies, now rejoicing in the potent influence of the Tamiya

shrine to restore to them the strayed affections of husband or lover. Next in line is an open, shed-like structure. It is a poor chance if here the casual visitor does not encounter one or two of the petitioners, patiently trotting round in a circle from front to back, and reciting their prayers in this accomplishment of "the hundred turns." Just opposite, and close by, is the shrine itself. This is in part a massive store-house set back in the domestic structure, with the

shrine of the Inari facing the visitor. The floor space at the sides and before it often is piled high with tubs of shoyu and saké, with bundles of charcoal, such negotiable articles as the wealthier shopkeeper can offer to the mighty lady; and long tresses of hair of women too poor to offer anything else, or wise enough to know that a woman could make no greater sacrifice. And is not the object of their worship a woman? Numerous are these severed

strands. Entering the shrine and passing the pleasant spoken warden at its entrance, peddling his charms and giving advice where often it is sadly needed — perhaps the more valuable of his two public duties — to the left within is the Oku-no-In, the inner shrine containing the ihai or memorial tablet of Lady Iwa. That the shrine is popular and wealthy; that the lady is feared, venerated, and her dreadful powers much sought after; this is plain to the eye in the

crowded elaborateness of this inner holy place of the larger sacred structure.

Now Echizenbori is not a particularly old quarter of the city. Long after Edo was established, the city, step by step, fought its way down to the river; filling in lagoons and swamps, and driving their waters into the canals which were to furnish very largely the means of communication for its traffic. Yotsuya on the contrary

is old. Its poverty is of later date. In the Edo days it was a favourite site for the homes of dōshin, yakunin, and a whole herd of the minor officials who had the actual working of the great Tokugawa machine of government in their hands. In the maps of 1857, the shrine of the Lady Iwa Inari figures in Samonchō, in its Teramachi; a small part of the great mass of red, indicating temples and shrines and their lands, which then covered a large part of

Yotsuya. How then did it come to pass that the shrine was removed to this far off site in Echizenbori, with such incongruous surroundings? The explanation must be found in our story.

Chapter 1: Lady MINO AND DENSUKÉ

When the year of 1681 opened, long resident at Yotsuya Samonchō had been Matazaémon of the noble family Tamiya.

By status he was a minor official or dōshin under the Tokugawa administration. These dōshin held highest rank of the permanent staff under the bureaucratic establishment; and on these men lay the main dependence for smoothness of working of the machinery of the Government.

Matazaémon was the perfect type of the under-official of the day; smooth, civilly impertinent to his equals, harsh to his

inferiors, and all unction and abjectness to his superiors. Indeed, he laid more stress on those immediately above him than on the more removed.

To serve the greater lord he served his immediate officer, being careful to allow to this superior all the credit for his own deeds.

No small part of his function was to see that ceremonial form and precedent were carried out to the letter. It was the accurate

and ready knowledge of these which was of greatest import to his chief, indeed might save the latter from disaster.

Matazaémon's readiness and conduct rendered him deservedly valued, hence he enjoyed the double salary of thirty tawara of rice, largely supplemented by gifts coming to him as teacher in flower arrangements and ceremonial tea.

He had a more than good house for one of his class, facing on the wide Samonchō road, and with a garden on the famous long street lined with temples and which runs eastward from that thoroughfare.

The garden of Tamiya almost faced the entrance to the Gwanshōji, which is one of the few relics of the time still extant.

The garden was large enough to contain some fifteen or twenty

fruit trees, mainly the persimmon, for Matazaémon was of practical mind. Several cherry trees, however, periodically displayed their bloom against the rich dark green foliage of the fruit trees; and in one corner, to set forth the mystic qualities of a small Inari shrine relic of a former owner, were five or six extremely ancient, gnarled, and propped up plum trees, sufficient in number to cast their delicate perfume through

garden and house in the month of March.

Such was the home of Matazaémon; later that of Lady Iwa San.

It was pretentious enough to make display with a large household, but the master of Tamiya was as close-fisted and hard and bitter as an unripe medlar fruit:

His wealth was the large and unprofitable seed which lay

within; the shallow layer of soup pulp, all he had to give to society in his narrow minded adherence to official routine; the smooth, easily peeled skin the outward sign of his pretentions to social status and easily aroused acidity of temper.

With most of his neighbors, and all his relatives, he had a standing quarrel.

Secure in his lord's favour as an earnest officer, so little did he care for the dislike of the

neighbors that he was ever at drawn swords with the head of his neighborhood association, Itō Kwaiba.

As for the relatives, they were only too ready to come to closer intimacy; and Matazaémon knew it.

His household consisted of his wife Lady Naka, his daughter Lady Mino, and the manservant Densuké. The garden, Matazaémon would allow no one to attend to but himself.

The two women did all the work of the household which ordinarily would fall to woman-kind, with something more.

Densuké performed the heavier tasks, accompanied his master on his outings, and represented his contribution to the service of the neighborhood barrier, on the great Kōshū-Kaidō highway, and just beyond the guard station.

The barrier cut off Yotsuya from the Naitō-Shinjuku district, and,

as an entrance into Edo, was of considerable importance.

When the time of service came Densuké appeared in full uniform and with his pike. A handsome young fellow of nineteen years, the women, especially Lady Mino, saw to it that his appearance should be a credit to the House.

His progress up the wide Samonchō road, up to his disappearance into the great highway, was watched by Lady

Mino — and by the neighbors, who had much sharper eyes and tongues than Matazaémon and his wife.

They marvelled.

With ground for marvel.

In the eyes of her parents Lady Mino was the most beautiful creature ever created. Occasionally Matazaémon would venture on criticism. "Naka, something is to be said to Mino. Too much powder is

used on the face. Unless the colour of the skin be very dark, the use of too much powder is not good. Mino is to be warned against excess." Thus spoke the official in his most official tone and manner.

Wife and daughter heard and disobeyed; the wife because she was ruled by her daughter, and the daughter because she would emulate the fair skin of Densuké and be fairer in his eyes.

Lady Mino had suffered both from fate and fortune: she had been born ugly; with broad, flat face like unto the moon at full, or a dish. Her back was a little humped, her arms disproportionately long, losing in plumpness what they gained in extension.

She seemed to have no breasts at all, the chest forming a concavity in correspondence to the convexity of the back, with a

smoothness much like the inner surface of a bowl.

This perhaps was no disadvantage — under the conditions. So much for fate, but fortune had been no kinder.

Blooming into girlhood, she had been attacked by smallpox.

Her father Matazaémon was busy, and knew nothing of sick nursing. Her mother Lady Naka was equally ignorant, though she was well intentioned.

To make matters worse, the then serving wench knew no more than her mistress.

Lady Mino was allowed to claw her countenance and body, as the itching of the sores drove her nearly frantic. In fact, Lady Naka in her charity aided her.

The result was that she was most hideously pock-marked. Furthermore, the disease cost her an eye, leaving a cavity, a gaping and unsightly wound, comparable to a dumpling of

white puffy rice dough, with a depression in the centre marked by a dab of dark-brown tofu.

The neighbors used to say that Lady Mino was three parts human and seven parts demon. The more critical reduced her humanity to the factor one. T

he children had no name for her but "Oni" — “Fiend”. They had reason for this; they would not play with her, and treated her most cruelly. Lady Mino, who was of no mild temperament,

soon learned to retaliate by use of an unusually robust frame, to which was united by nature and circumstances her father's acidity of character.

When she was not too outnumbered, not all the tears and bruises were on Lady Mino's side; but she still suffered greatly, and learned with years that the Tamiya garden was her safest playground.

Lady Mino grew into a woman, and affection had to find some outlet. Not on the practical and very prosaic mother; not on the absorbed and crabbed father; but on Densuké, her father’s servant, it fell.

All manner of little services were rendered to him; even such as would appropriately fall within his own performance. At first Lady Mino sought out little missions for him to perform, out of the line of his usual duties,

and well rewarded in coin. This was at his first appearance in the house.

Then she grew bolder. Densuké found his clothing undergoing mysterious repairs and replacement. His washing, even down to the loin cloths, was undertaken by the daughter of the house. Densuké did not dare to question or thwart her.

Any trifling fault, Lady Mino took on herself, as due to her meddling. She became bolder

and bolder, and sought his assistance in her own duties, until finally they were as man and maid employed in the same house.

Matazaémon noted some increases in the house expenses. Lady Mino took these as due to her own extravagance.

The father grunted a little at these unusual expenditures. "What goes out at one end must be cut off at the other end. Densuké, oil is very expensive.

At night a light is not needed. Be sure, therefore, on going to bed to extinguish the light."

Densuké at once obeyed his master's order; and that very night, for the first time, Lady Mino boldly sought his couch.

Confused, frightened, overpowered by a passionate woman, Densuké sinned against his lord, with his master's daughter as accomplice.

Henceforth Densuké had what Lady Mino was willing to give him.

On Matazaémon's going forth to his duties, Lady Mino, and Lady Naka under her orders, did all his household work. The only return required was submission to the exigencies of the daughter of the house.

This was no slight obligation. Densuké at times thought of escape, to his home at Tōgané village in Kazusa, to his uncle

Kyūbei in the Kanda quarter of Edo.

Lady Mino seemed to divine his thoughts. She would overload him with favors; or openly express her purpose of following wherever he went in life. Kanda? Kyūbei was a well-known hanger-on at the Tamiya. Matazaémon entered him up in his expense book at so much a year. Tōgané? He could not get there except through Kyūbei. Matazaémon had farms there,

and the nanushi or village bailiff was his servant. Besides, he would be a runaway. Matazaémon surely would come down on Kyūbei as the security.

So the months passed, and matters were allowed to drift.

Perhaps it was some gossip of the quarter which reached the deaf ears of Matazaémon. As he was about to go forth one day he followed the figure of Lady Mino sharply with his little eyes all screwed up. "Naka, there

seems change in the figure of Mino. Surely the gossip of the neighbors as to Densuké is not true? Mino is said to harbour a child by him. In such case it would be necessary to kill them both. Warn Mino in time; a servant is not one to become the adopted son of the Tamiya. He is an excellent lad, and costs but little. His habits are not riotous. To dismiss him thus causelessly would not only be unjust, but to no profit. Mino giving heed to the warning, all will be well."

With this the lord of the household stalked forth to the house entrance. Receiving his clogs from his daughter, he went forth to his official attendance.

The two women, prostrate in salutation at his exit, raised their heads to watch him go.

It was a frightened face that Lady Naka turned to her daughter. In whispering voice — "The honoured father's words have been heard? If not, it is to

be said that gossip of the neighborhood has come to his ears as to relations with Densuké. He notices that an obi is not often worn; and when worn is soon discarded. However, a man's eye is not so apt in such matters. Even in this Naka cannot speak positively. Doubtless the report is not true."

Lady Mino, if ugly, was anything but obtuse. Her mother must know; and yet not know. "My

honoured father does not consider the difference of age and status in Densuké. Densuké is but a boy. This Mino has passed her twenty-third year. Moreover, surely she deserves a better husband than a servant. Least of all would she give her father cause for regret or painful thoughts. Can a woman be pregnant otherwise than by a man?" This said, Lady Mino, respectfully prostrate, raised her head.

The two women looked each other in the face.

Finally Lady Naka said — "With joy is the answer heard. But Matazaémon San is of hasty temper. In his suspicions even he is to be avoided. However, the business of the house is to be performed. This will take the time until late in the day. Tradesmen may come for payments of the month. In the closet ten ryō in silver will be found. Here are the keys to the

chests. It would be well to take an inventory of the effects. The winter is at hand. It is time to make warmer provision for it. Be sure to observe circumspection."

With these words, and a sad look at her erring daughter, Lady Naka donned street garb, threw a cloak over her shoulders, climbed down into her clogs, and their patter soon disappeared down the street.

Her departure was almost coincident with the reappearance of Densuké. His attendance on the master to the offices of the palace stables accomplished, for the time being he had returned. Thus did Matazaémon effect an outward state and an household economy.

None too willing was the presence of Densuké. He was faithful in his way to Lady Mino, and much afraid of her. Even in

the most private intercourse to him she was the daughter of the house, but he had no other recourse than the Tamiya.

Once assured of him, Lady Mino had cut off all the previous flow of coin, and with it the means of his rare indiscretions at the Shinjuku pleasure quarter.

Besides, their interviews took place in the darkness of night. In the daytime Lady Naka usually was present, who, lacking other company, sought

that of her daughter, and moreover was unwilling to be too complacent in the intrigue she saw going on.

As soon as the sound of Densuké's steps was heard, Lady Mino called him. There was a sharpness in her tone, a note of alarmed decision, that frightened and chilled him. Humbly he sought her presence. A glance showed the absence of Lady Naka, yet as usual he prostrated himself in salutation.

In that position he did not see her face.

She said impatiently — "For salutation there is no time nor occasion. It is no longer the daughter of the house who speaks; it is the wife. My father knows all concerning this Mino and Densuké. On his return he is sure to take the occasion of the presence of both to kill us. It is his right and our duty to submit to his punishment. But to do so consigns the infant in

the womb from darkness to darkness. This is too dreadful to contemplate. Unfilial though it be, we must run away. Make up your mind to do so."

Densuké looked up.

Lady Mino was bent in meditation over this flight. The corners of the mouth widened out, the eyelid drooping more conspicuously than ever and forming a heavy fold over the empty socket, the bald brow, the scanty hair at the sides in

disordered whisps and strands, all these made her a hideous mask.

He could not endure the sight. Timidly he said — "Terrible news indeed! How has it happened? Surely, honoured lady, you have been very rash; nay, somewhat clumsy withal. Cannot women take their pleasure with whom they please without such dire results? Ah! Such luxury, such pleasant surroundings! All must be

abandoned. This Densuké will seek his native village in Kazusa. And the daughter of the house, whither will she go; what will she do?"

Was the question asked in innocence, or in deepest guile? Lady Mino could not have answered, well as she thought she knew Densuké.

He felt a hand on his shoulder. He sprang up in fright, hardly knowing whether it was a

demon, or Lady Mino turned demon, who confronted him.

Her mouth half open, her large, white, shining, even teeth all displayed, her single eye darting malignant gleams, and the empty socket and its fold quivering and shaking, she was a frightful object. "To speak of pleasure without the consequences, such talk is that of a fool. Densuké was taken for the relationship of the two worlds. Now you would abandon

me. Very well — do so. But this Mino does not perish by her father's sword. The well is at hand. Within three days I shall reappear and hunt you out. Torn to pieces the wretched man shall die a miserable death. Better would it be now to die with Mino. A last salutation...."

Two vigorous arms seized his neck. Densuké gave a cry of anguish as the sharp teeth marked the ear.

Letting him go, Lady Mino sprang to the verandah.

Frightened as he was, Densuké was too quick for her. He grasped her robe. "Nay! The daughter of the house must not act so desperately. Densuké spoke as one clumsy, and at a loss what to do ... yes ... we must run away ... there is the uncle, Kawai, in Kanda. To him Densuké will go, and there learn the will of Tamiya Dono."

Lady Mino's tragic attitude lapsed. At once she was the practical woman of the house.

She gave thanks for her mother's foresight. "The escape is not as of those unprovided. Here are ten ryō in silver. A bundle is to be made of the clothing and other effects. This is to be carried by Densuké. And the uncle: Mino presenting herself for the first time as wife, a present is to be brought. What should it be?" She talked away,

already busy with piling clothes, futon bedrolls, toilet articles onto a large square piece of cloth. Then she arrayed her person with greatest care, and in the soberest and richest fashion as the newly-wed wife.

With time Densuké managed to get his breath amid this vortex of unexpected confusion into which he had been launched. "The uncle's teeth are bad. Soft pickled raddish is just the thing. For long he has eaten little else.

Four or five stalks are sufficient."

He went to the kitchen to secure this valued gift. Then he collected his own possessions. With the huge bundle on his shoulders; with straw raincoat, sun hat, clogs for wet and dry weather, piled on the top, and the stalks of the raddishes dangling down; it was just as if they were running away from a fire.

As Densuké departed, Lady Mino closely observed him. He was too subdued, too scared to give her anxiety. Later she left the house to join him at the Hanzō-bashi, far enough removed from the neighborhood of Yotsuya.

It was then December, 1682.

CHAPTER 2: KAWAI SAN OF KANDU KU

This uncle of Densuké, Kawai Kyūbei by name, was a rice dealer, with a shop in Matsudachō of the Kanda district.

The distance to go was far. As with all ladies, Lady Mino kept Densuké waiting long at the Hanzō-bashi. Indeed, there was much romance about this ugly, neglected, hard girl.

She waited until the sound of Lady Naka's clogs was heard. Then she halted at the corner of Teramachi until she could see her mother's figure in the dusk; see it disappear into the house. When she went down the street toward the Samégabashi she was crying.

It was late therefore — after 9pm, the hour of the pig — when the pair reached Kanda.

The business of the day was long over in this business

section of Edo. The houses were tightly closed.

On reaching the entrance of Kyūbei's house said Densuké — "daughter of the house, condescend to wait here for a moment. The uncle is to be informed. Deign to have an eye to the luggage. Please don't let the dogs bite into or insult the raddishes." He pounded on the door.

Said a voice within — "Wife! Wife! Someone knocks. Please go and open for them."

The more quavering and softer tones of an old woman made answer — "No, it is not my turn and time to go to the door. Get up; and first make inquiry before entrance is allowed. With little to lose, loss is much felt. Ah! Tamiya Dono in the Yotsuya has been sadly neglected."

The scolding tones hummed on.

Grumbling, the old man was lighting a rush. "'Tis agreed; 'tis agreed. To-morrow without fail this Kyūbei visits Tamiya. Ah! It is no jest to go to that house. Not only is the distance great, but...."

He had the door open, and his mouth too. "Densuké! Graceless fellow! But what are you doing here, and at this hour? No; the luck is good. There is a big bundle with you, a huge bundle."

He spied the raddishes and his face broadened into a smile. "Ah! If dismissed, it has been with honour. Doubtless the pickles are for this Kyūbei. Thanks are felt. But is all this stuff Densuké's? He has not stolen it? Doubtless a woman is at the bottom of the affair. Never mind; an opportunity presents itself to offer you as heir — at the Tatsuya in Yokomachi. Of late a boy has been hoped for, but another girl presented herself. A heir now

will be welcome. The wife is getting past child-bearing, and there is little hope of a son. The Tatsuya girl is just the thing. In a few months she will be fit to be a wife. She...."

Densuké edged a word into this stream. "The honoured uncle is right. The cause of Densuké's appearance is a woman."

The old man made a face. Said he — "Well, in such a case it is good to be out of it. This Kyūbei has heard talk of Densuké —

and of all things with the daughter of the house! That would be terrible indeed. But how is the Oni? What a sight she is! Bald, one-eyed, hairless, with a face like a dish and no nose — Kyūbei came suddenly on her at dusk in the Yotsuya. Iya! It was cold feet and chills for him for the space of seven days. It is that which keeps Kyūbei from Yotsuya, although a little money would go far. The last dealings in rice notes were not favourable. Besides, account

is soon to be rendered to Tamiya Dono. But though wicked of temper and ugly, Lady Mino San is rich. Even for the demon in time a good match will be found. She will be the wife of an honoured vassal, and the husband will buy geisha and jorō with the money. Such is the expectation of Tamiya Dono. Don't allow any trifling there. Remember that she is the daughter of a go-kenin. They talk of Densuké in the Yotsuya.

Of course it is all talk. Don't allow it to happen."

Densuké found an opening. "It has already happened."

Kyūbei looked at him aghast. "What! With the demon? Densuké has committed the carnal sin with the demon? Oh, you filthy scoundrel! Rash, inconsiderate boy! Wife! Wife!... What did she pay you for the deed?... This low fellow Densuké, this foolish rascal of a nephew, has been caught in

fornication with the demon…. What a fool! How is it that death has been escaped? And you have run away. Doubtless a pregnancy has followed. After putting his daughter to death Tamiya Dono will surely hunt out Densuké. Or perhaps keep Lady Mino San until he catches the interloper. Sinning together, both will die together. Ah! To cross the River of the Dead, to climb the Mountain to the Heavens, with the demon as company: terrific! It is terrific!

And what has become of her? Why fall into such a trap, with a woman old and ugly? Her riches are not for you. Caught here, the mats of Kyūbei will be spoiled by blood."

Densuké countered. He spoke in the old man's ear. "Refusing help, she threatened to kill herself and haunt this Densuké as a ghost. The uncle has seen the daughter of the house. Would he be haunted by her, be seized and killed with torture?...

And then — here she stands, just at the door."

The old man spluttered, and gasped, and went on his nose in abject salutation — "Oh, the fool!... the daughter of the house is here in person ... he would trifle with the devil!... the low rascal would seduce the honoured daughter of Tamiya ... put ten hags in a row and pick out the worst ... will the daughter of the house condescend to honour Kyūbei's

place.... Oh! She's a very incubus already. Pregnancy with a beautiful woman is bad enough. With this demon it makes her a nightmare ... condescend to enter; deign to enter."

Lady Mino slowly came forward. That what had been said by the rash and unconscious Kyūbei had escaped her ear was unlikely. The humility of demeanor hardly veiled the offended dignity of her

approach. "Densuké has spoken truth. We come as husband and wife. Condescend to give shelter for the time being, and become the intercessor with Tamiya Dono. Such is the prayer of this Mino." As she spoke she bowed low on the mats.

Kyūbei caught the hint; for if she had heard the talk of Densuké, she had assuredly heard his still louder ejaculations and ill-timed wit.

His wife was in a rage at him. Taking the conduct of affairs in her own hand — "Condescend to make this poor dwelling a home for as long as desired. Plainly the visitors have not come empty handed. Ma! Ma! 'Tis like an escape from a fire. Densuké is a strong lad to shoulder such a burden. But he always has been something of an ass. As for Matazaémon Dono, to-morrow the my husband shall attend to the affair, and see what is to be

expected. Meanwhile, deign to be as in Samonchō itself."

The kindly old woman pushed Kyūbei and his clumsy apologies out of the way. She busied herself about Lady Mino. The two women understood each other.

The varied contents of the luggage were quickly stowed away. A little supper was prepared for the hungry fugitives.

Kyūbei sat by, his eyes dazzled by the wealth of goods displayed, and his nostrils shifting under the acrid perfume of the pickles and remembrance of his stupidity.

The next morning Kyūbei was up betimes. Matazaémon was no dawdler. It was best to catch him satisfied with the morning meal, and perhaps beset by the night's regret over the loss of his daughter. In no way was it a pleasant mission.

Kyūbei's pace became a crawl as he approached the garden gate on Teramachi. He put in an appearance at the kitchen side. Lady Naka was here established, engaged in her duties and surely awaiting him.

At sight of him she burst into what was half laugh and half tears. "Ah! It is Kyūbei San. Doubtless he comes on the part of Mino and Densuké. It is kind of Kyūbei to befriend them. The Master is very angry indeed. An

only daughter, and one on whom he depended for a heir, he is much upset. Please go in and talk with him. Show anger at the runaways. To agree with him may somewhat soothe his passion. Condescend so to act."

Kyūbei winked. And turn some of this anger on himself? Well, agreement might rouse the spirit of contradiction in Tamiya Dono. It was a characteristic of this hide-bound official.

Matazaémon was drinking the last sips of tea from his rice bowl when the shōji were gently pushed apart, and the head of Kyūbei inserted in the opening. At first he paid no attention. Then as one in haste — "Ah! Is it Kyūbei? He comes early to-day — and hardly to apply for anything. The rice notes are not yet due for some weeks." His tone was grim; the usual indifferent benevolence of demeanor toward a townsman was conspicuously absent.

Kyūbei felt chilled. Densuké must not sacrifice his good uncle to his own folly.

Said Kyūbei — "Yet it is to seek the honoured benevolence of Tamiya Dono that Kyūbei comes."

Matazaémon turned sharp around toward him.

Frightened, the townsman continued — "Densuké has acted very wickedly. The low, lascivious rascal has dared to

seduce the honoured daughter of the House. Both are now harboured at the house of this Kyūbei, who now makes report. Their lives are in the hand of Tamiya Dono. But Kyūbei would make earnest plea for delay. Lady Mino San being pregnant, the child would be sent from darkness to darkness — a terrible fate. May it be condescended to show the honoured mercy and benevolence. Evil and unfilial though the action of the two has

been, yet 'benevolence weighs the offence; justice possesses two qualities.' Such are the words of Confucius."

The eyes of Matazaémon twinkled. He had heard that Kyūbei was on the verge of shaving his head and becoming a monk. Truly the townsman was profitting by the exhortations of his teacher.

After a time he said — "The memory of Kyūbei is excellent. Don't let it fail him on the

present occasion. For such a deed as has been committed the punishment is death, meted out by the hand of this Matazaémon. The fact ascertained, it was intended to kill them both. The flight of Mino and Densuké has altered the complexion of the affair. It is no longer necessary to inflict the extreme penalty. Lady Mino is disowned for seven births. Neither she nor Densuké is to appear before this Matazaémon. If the talk of the neighborhood

be true, in exchange for a loyal service Densuké has secured a beautiful bride. There can be no regrets." Then, taking a sprightly and jeering air, "But this Kyūbei has been the one to exercise benevolence. Matazaémon now learns that the two runaways have been received by him. Entertain them well; entertain them well. Thanks are due to Kyūbei San — from them. Doubtless he is much occupied with his guests. Less will be seen of him in

Yotsuya.... But official duties press. This Matazaémon must leave. Don't be in haste. Stay and take some tea.... Wife! Wife! Tea for Kyūbei San; the cloak of Matazaémon.... Sayonara.... Ah! The rice notes this Matazaémon took up for Kyūbei San, they fall due with the passage of the weeks. But Kyūbei is one who always meets his obligations. As to that there is no anxiety." With this last fling the prostrate Kyūbei heard the sound of the

clogs of Matazaémon on the flagged walk outside.

A departing warning to Lady Naka as to the tea, and steps were heard near-by.

He raised his head, to confront the mistress of the house.

Lady Naka spoke with tears in her eyes — a salve to the alarmed and wounded feelings of Kyūbei. "Don't be frightened. After all Matazaémon is a samurai. To press Kyūbei, or any

tradesman, is beyond him. But this Naka cannot see her daughter! To add to his anger would bring disaster on her and the unborn child. Alas! Anyhow, give Mino this money; and these articles of value, properly her own. Her mirror has been forgotten in the hasty flight."

Lady Naka brought forth one of those elaborate polished silver surfaces, used by the ladies of Nippon in these later luxurious days of the Shōgunate.

It was only now that it became the property of Lady Mino. It was part of the wedding outfit of Lady Naka herself.

With this little fiction the mother continued — "When the child is born allow the grandmother at least a distant sight of it. Perhaps it will resemble Tamiya; be like its mother, and soften a father's heart."

Now she wept bitterly; and Kyūbei wept with her — bitterly.

‘Like the mother! The Buddhas of Daienji would indeed weep at the appearance of such a monster.’ This was his thought; not expressed with the humble gratitude, prostration, and promises which he fully intended to keep.

Kyūbei reverentially accepted the mirror, the goods, the money. Taking his leave of Yotsuya — a long one he feared — with sighs he set out for

Kanda. Here he made his report.

Said the old townsman with severity — "The will of the parent is not to be disobeyed. It is the duty of this Kyūbei to see to its performance." He had Lady Naka more in mind than the master of Tamiya. Lady Mino might yet be the goose to lay golden eggs. A goose of such plumage! Kyūbei made a wry face in the darkness of the corridor.

CHAPTER 3: TAKAHASHI DAIHACHIRŌ

Some means of support had to be found.

Employed in a lord's house, and leaving it under such conditions, kindred occupation was out of the question. There was a sort of blacklist among these officials to cover all grades of their service. Time and the host of servants of some great House would get the lad back into the only occupation he understood.

Trusting to some such accident of fortune, Kyūbei made Densuké his agent on commission. Densuké was no idler. Kyūbei managed to meet the Tamiya security for his loans, largely through the efforts of the younger man.

The married couple at this time set up their establishment in Gorōbeichō of Kyōbashi Ku. Coming and going, often with no definite task in hand,

Densuké to all appearance was an out-and-out idler.

For the first time released from the trammels of her class, Lady Mino could attend the theatres and farce shows of the capital. She delighted in acting this part of a tradesman's wife. Moreover she was very sure of not meeting with Matazaémon, of whom she was in great fear. Bound to the formulæ of his class, her father might feel bound to cut her down on sight.

One day Densuké was idling and hanging over the parapet of the Nihonbashi. Some fishermen were violently quarrelling in the fish market on the bank just below the bridge. As he looked on with interest a hand was laid on his shoulder. Turning, he saw a man, partly in the dress of a servant, partly in that of a menial attendant of one of the larger nobleman's mansion. Scars of burns on his hands and arms, patches of rice flour and

bran, showed that he was a cook.

His eye was severe and his manner abrupt as he rebuked Densuké. "An idle fellow! This Tarōbei never fails to come across Densuké as an idler, or on the way to Asakusa with the worthy wife. Is he fit for nothing?"

Densuké was a mild man. To this man with a grievance his answer was soft. Besides he had no liking for the cook's knife

stuck in the girdle, and handy to carve fish or flesh. He said — "Perchance the idleness is more in appearance than fact. Buying and selling on commission the task is an irregular one. It is true, however, that this Densuké has no settled labour. Alas! Former days in the service of a samurai are much to be regretted—"

"Can you cook rice?" was the abrupt interruption.

"This Densuké knows the 'Sanryaku' fairly well. Is more needed?"

The man looked at him dumbfounded. "The 'Sanryaku' — what's that?" —

"Knowledge of the 'Sanryaku' enables one to meet all the requirements of a samurai. At the school in Kazusa Tōgané the priest who taught this Densuké, at one time a samurai, was far more taken with the 'Sanryaku' than with the Sutra; the lessons

taught applied more to the way of the warrior than to the way of the monk ... But to the point; this Densuké for three years cooked the rice at Tamiya in Yotsuya. First there is the toro-toro of bubbling water; then the biri-biri, as what little remains passes as steam through the rice grains. Then the sharp whistling cry of a baby from the pot on the slow fire. The task is done, and the vessel is removed from the stove."

The man looked with respect on this learned cook. Said he — "Densuké is the man. Tarōbei must leave the kitchen of Geishū Sama at once. The mother is ill in Aki province. A substitute is to be found. The salary — is next to nothing; but the perquisites are numerous, and the food ample to feed several Densuké and their wives. Deign to accept."

Densuké did not hesitate — "The obligation lies with

Densuké. But how secure the position? There is Tamiya...."

The man laughed. "There are many Densuké in Edo; and no connection between the yashiki of Matsudaira Aki no Kami and the house of a dōshin in Yotsuya. There is small likelihood of meeting old acquaintances. Be sure to remember that it is Densuké of Kyōbashi; not Densuké of Yotsuya. This pass will answer to the gate-man. Substitutes are

common. Whether it be Densuké or Tarōbei who cooks the rice makes no difference; provided the rice be well cooked. Tarōbei's service lies elsewhere; to Densuké San deep his obligation." He held out the pass, and Densuké took it.

With mutual salutation and joy in heart they parted.

Densuké betook himself to the yashiki of Matsudaira Aki no Kami at Kasumigaseki. No difficulties were encountered.

Tarōbei was not so superlative as a cook that the substitute could not be better than the original.

At this place Densuké acted the part of the komatsukibatta. This is a narrow brown weevil, some three parts of an inch in length, and which stands on its head making the repeated movements of o'jigi, much as at a ceremonial encounter in Nippon.

Densuké was not long in becoming well liked. He was ready to run errands for all, outside of the hours of his duties. From those higher up in the yashiki these errands brought him coin. Every month he could bring Lady Mino twenty to thirty mon in "cash"; apart from the ample rations of rice and daikon bestowed on the kitchen staff. Nay: as cook at times fish could not be allowed to spoil, and fell to the perquisites of Densuké.

Thus time passed; and with it the delivery of Lady Mino, and the crisis in the affairs of Densuké approached.

Now Geishū Sama was a fourth month daimyō. Hence with the iris blossoms he took his departure from Edo to the government of his fief in Aki province.

The Sakuji Machibugyō, one Takahashi Daihachirō, plead illness on this occasion of the

exodus. As unable to accompany his lord he remained in Edo.

On plea of convenience he established himself in the abandoned quarters of the common soldiers, situated right over Densuké's cooking stoves.

Entirely removed from the bustle of the household, except during Densuké's now rare attendance, he secured complete isolation and quiet.

Densuké went on cooking for Takahashi Sama, just as if it had been for the whole military household.

Daihachirō was a forbidding kind of man; and it was with no amiable look that he greeted Densuké when the latter appeared very late to prepare the meal. It being the 30th of May, 1683, perhaps he suspected Densuké of preparation for, and

participation in, the great festival which was in progress.

"Densuké is very late. This Daihachirō has made the trial; to find out that he is no cook. Indeed the right hand has been severely burnt. A cook should be on time — for the meal, not the festival."

Densuké was all apology — "Nay, Danna Sama; it is not the festival which has detained Densuké. An infant was expected to-day by the wife.

Hence Densuké's neglect. Deign to pardon him —”

"A baby being born is no reason why Daihachirō should starve. Prepare the meal in haste. The rice is to be soft; and please see that the fish also is soft. Make the sauce not too sharp. It would give great trouble to make the bath in the quarters. In Owarimachi, or Kubomachi, good bath-houses are to be found."

Densuké took the hint. At once he recommended one he thought befitting the great man's greatness.

"Well: Sayonara. See that the meal is ready by the return." Off stalked Takahashi Daihachirō, towel dangling from his hand, and toothbrush and bran bag in his bosom.

Densuké gave a sigh of relief as he left the court. Daihachirō often employed him on missions, and was never

particularly generous even when the transaction was decidedly shady. Densuké was dreadfully afraid of him. Somehow he felt as if Daihachirō was Fate — his fate.

Turning to his stoves, the pots and the pans, the meal soon was in successful preparation. As Densuké lifted the cover to inspect the rice — splash! A great red spot spread in widening circle over the white mass.

In fright Densuké clapped on the lid of the pot. He looked upward, to locate this unusual condiment to his provision. On his forehead he received in person a second consignment. Applying his finger to his head, and then to his nose — "Blood! Ah! Lady Také's fierce cat has caught a rat and is chewing it in the room above. How vexatious! If the Danna should find out...."

Hastily he tried to shove his equipment to one side. This

would not do. The massive stone blocks forming the furnace were too heavy for Densuké to move unaided. Somewhat helpless he looked around. The rice was almost done; ready to be simmered over the slow fire. The fish, carefully prepared, as yet was to be cooked. All was to be ready against the return of Daihachirō Sama.

Ah! Again the dropping began. As finding some channel in the rough boarding of the ceiling it

came fast. His kitchen began to look like the place where the Eta burakumin slaughter beasts. Densuké shuddered.

Circumstances, the results involved, make the timid brave.

Grasping a pole Densuké started up the ladder leading to the loft and the quarters of the foot solider.

Arrived at the top his eyes took in the poor apartment. The rafters and beams of a low-cast

roof; six wretched mats on the floor, for the men to sit, and sleep, and live upon; such its bare equipment.

In the middle of the mats was a great red stain. Densuké was at once attracted to it. "A cat will eat a rat; but it will not wipe up the blood..."

His eyes were caught by the straw basket used to store away the raincoats. This was all stained red at the bottom. Going close up he found it was wet.

Perhaps the cat was at work inside.

Densuké raised the cover and looked in.

In alarm he sprang back.

On the trunk and limbs of a body was placed a freshly severed head.

Without replacing the cover, with pole uplifted over his head in defence, Densuké backed toward the ladder. His one idea was to flee this yashiki.

As he reached the top of the steps the voice of Daihachirō was heard below — "A pest on such filthy bath-houses; and filthier patrons.... What! No rice yet, Densuké? Ah! Where is the fellow?"

Densuké looked down, to meet the altered countenance of Daihachirō looking up. He retreated as the latter sprang up the ladder. Daihachirō gave a rapid glance. He saw the raised cover of the basket.

The next moment the bosom of Densuké's dress was harshly grasped, and he himself was forced down on the floor.

Gloomily Daihachirō regarded him — "Rash and curious fellow! Why not keep to your pots and pans? Densuké loses his life; and Daihachirō a fool for a cook." He had drawn his sword to strike.

Densuké clung to his knees in petition — "Pardon, master! Pardon! This Densuké is no idle

gossip. The dripping blood threatened to spoil the meal. Thinking the cat was eating a rat, fearing the anger of the Danna Sama if the meal had to be re-cooked, Densuké came up here to chase the animal away. Thus the crime was discovered. ..."

"Crime!" thundered Daihachirō. "Ah! This intermeddler must certainly die. By the word of a samurai...."

In his terror Densuké almost put his hand over the irrevocable sentence. He spoke with life at stake. "Deign, master, to pardon Densuké. He has committed no offence; knows of no offence in others. Densuké has seen nothing. Life is a jewel, to be kept at any cost. Densuké is far too insignificant to deserve the anger of Takahashi Sama." He grovelled in the abject terror of his petition.

Takahashi Daihachirō hesitated. An idea seemed to occur to him, at sight of the man's fear-struck state. He smiled grimly. "Densuké saw the head?"

"'Tis so," admitted Densuké. "But to see a head means nothing."

Daihachirō dragged him over to the raincoat basket. Holding him down, he grasped the head by the cue and lifted it out. "Look!"

Densuké gave a cry of surprise at sight of the features of a once neighbor. "It is the head of Iséya Jusuké, the money lender of Hachōbori; a hard man. Surely the Danna...."

"Just so," replied Daihachirō, carelessly throwing the mortuary relic back into the basket. "Borrowing five ryō, in six months with the interest the sum now due is twenty-five ryō. Pleading illness Daihachirō remained in Edo, to try and

soften the usurer. He threatened a report to my lord; grew insolent beyond measure. The sword drawn, he was killed forthwith.... Here Densuké finds his use and saves his life. This body is an awkward impediment. Densuké must take and cast it away. Otherwise, a second head is added to this first. With one already to dispose of a second gives no difficulty. Decide: is it agreed? Moreover there will be payment."

He took out a money belt, that of Jusuké. Densuké recognized it. Daihachirō had robbed Jusuké, after killing him. Lovingly he ran the golden ryō through his fingers. Seventy of them Densuké counted.

Daihachirō picked out three ryō. "Here is payment. Life is spared, and it is agreed to cast away the body."

Stammered Densuké — "On the rubbish heap?"

Daihachirō looked at him — "You fool! Why not proclaim that Densuké murdered Jusuké? Once the gate is passed — and this Daihachirō goes in company so far — it is Densuké who is the murderer of Jusuké. Remain in this place until night. Then off with the body; pitch it into the ditch of Kuroda Ke, or that of Saiō Dono. Daihachirō now takes his meal. There is nothing wrong with it?" He looked meaningly at Densuké.

The latter, with eyes on the shining sword, at once denied all defilement. He now plumed himself on the care taken of the Danna's interests.

Daihachirō descended; to feed at ease and keep watch over the unwilling Densuké.

In the month of June the days are long. Densuké was a coward; and for company had the corpse of the murdered Jusuké. To the poor cook the time passed was torture.

He was continually going to the stair and calling down — "Danna Sama, has the time come?... Ah! The sky is light. The streets at night will be full of people with lanterns. Plainly Lady Sun has forgotten to decline in the West. Alas! This Densuké is most unlucky."

At last 7pm, the Hour of the Dog, was passing.

Daihachirō appeared. "Now for the corpse! Wrap it up in this matting.... Coward! Is Densuké

afraid of a dead man?" He took the body and cut the tendons of arms and legs. Then he placed the head on the belly. Doubling the limbs over the body so as to hold the head he wrapped the matting around the whole. The outside he covered with some red raincoats — "in case of accidental stains." Then he strongly roped the whole together. He stood back to inspect a truly admirable job.

Densuké wondered how many usurers Daihachirō had thus disposed of. His speculations were interrupted. Everything was ready. "Now! the loan of Densuké's back."

Groaned Densuké — "Danna Sama, a request."

"What?" asked Daihachirō.

"Condescend to put a board between the body of Densuké and that of Jusuké. The head

might seize and bite me with its teeth."

Daihachirō snorted with laughter, contempt, and anger mixed. "What a cowardly rascal you are! Off with it as it is."

Said Densuké respectfully and firmly — "The task is that of Densuké. Condescend so far to favour him."

His obvious terror threatened collapse even of the influence of Daihachirō.

An old remnant of the back of a corselet was at hand. Said Daihachirō — "This is still better. It is metal. In it goes. Now off with you."

Stalking along in the rear of the unfortunate cook, Daihachirō kept within easy distance of a sword blow. At the gate he said — "Pray grant passage. Densuké takes washing of this Daihachirō — bed quilts and futon to be renovated."

"Respectfully heard and understood." The gate-man let fall the bar and stood aside.

Densuké passed into the street. A little way off he looked around. Takahashi Daihachirō had disappeared. Now indeed it was an affair between Densuké and Jusuké.

CHAPTER 4: THE APPEARANCE OF Lady IWA SAN

Shouldering his pack Densuké made off down the broad space lined by the white walls of the yashiki.

In this quarter of the city the road was not crowded with citizens and their lanterns. Densuké had high hopes of an early disposing of the nightmare. He approached the

ditch which protected the wall of the yashiki of Prince Kuroda.

When about to put down the bundle a hail reached him from the samurai on guard at the Kuroda gate. "Heigh there, rascal! Wait!" But Densuké did not wait.

In terror he gave the load a shift on his shoulder and started off almost at a run. On doing so there was a movement within.

The cold sweat stood out on the unhappy man's forehead. A moment, and would the teeth of Jusuké be fastened in his shoulder? "Ah! Jusuké San! Good neighbor! This Densuké is but the wretched agent. 'Tis Daihachirō Sama who killed Jusuké. Deign to pursue and haunt Takahashi Sama. Jusuké San! Jusuké San!"

Fright gave him strength and boldness. The Tiger Gate of the castle should be the place of

disposal. Here the ditch was deep and dark. But to its very edge swarmed the people with their lanterns on this night of festival in early summer.

The moor of Kubomachi was his next goal. At this period it really was open ground.

With a sigh of relief Densuké let the bundle slip from his now weary shoulders. Alive he would have laughed at the idea of carrying the portly Jusuké. Yet here the usurer bestrode him,

far heavier weight than on other unfortunate clients.

"Let's have a look at him; address him face to face." His hand was on the knot, when a woman's voice spoke in his ear.

Densuké did not wait to ascertain the nature of her solicitation. He sped away into the darkness, toward the distant city.

Without goal, he found himself at Shiodomé. Crossing the

Shimbashi he entered on the crowded and lighted Owarichō.

It was only 9pm, the Hour of the Pig, and the house lanterns as yet burned brightly.

He hesitated, with the idea of turning toward Shiba, of trying his luck in this still rustic district; or on the seashore, not far off.

A man close by greeted him. "Iya! Densuké San at last is found. The honoured wife

suffers great anxiety. Thinking that the festival might be the attraction this Goémon set out to find you. Deign to hasten at once to Gorōbeichō."

Densuké shifted his burden away from the man. Did it not already somewhat taint the air? His nostrils were wide open in alarmed inquiry.

He made excuses. With his heavy pack he would follow after slowly. He was overwhelmed by his neighbor's

kindness. Goémon offered to share the work. Densuké did more than refuse.

Unable to shake off his companion in stolid desperation he took his way to his home in the tenement. "I’m home!", he called from the doorway. Entering the shabby room he put down the luggage in a distant corner. Going to the house altar, at once he lit the lamps.

Lady Mino eyed him with astonishment. "What's that?" she asked, pointing to the bundle.

"Washing of Daihachirō Sama"

"But Mino is along in her pregnancy. So situated she cannot do washing. How negligent!"

"It makes no matter," replied Densuké recklessly.

Lady Mino did not like the tone of his voice. She eyed him

sharply. Then more pressing matters urged. "Weary as you are it is to be regretted; but money must be in hand, for the midwife and other expenses. A few hours, and this Mino will be unable to leave her bed — for three weeks. There is cooking and washing to be done. Please go to Kyūbei San and ask the loan of a ryō. Perhaps he will give half."

"He will give nothing," was the surly reply of Densuké. "Of

loans he has grown tired of late. As the uncle is the only relative, in dire necessity care must be taken not to offend. Moreover, the loan is unnecessary. Here are three ryō." He brought out the shining oblong pieces.

Lady Mino's eyes were bright with terror. "Ah! Has Densuké turned thief? How was this money secured? What has happened? Why so late in returning?"

But Densuké was made confident and ready of tongue by the physical helplessness of Lady Mino. "Don't be alarmed. Densuké is neither thief nor murderer. He is no Shirai Gompachi. Perhaps there is a corpse within, not washing. Would the daughter of the house see a head, arms, legs, freshly severed?" He laughed harshly as she turned her head from him to the bundle, then back again. "This money was given to Densuké by Takahashi

Sama; in return for faithful service in an important matter. Don't be frightened. It has been honestly earned."

Said Lady Mino, almost to herself — "But Daihachirō Sama is not one to give such a sum as three ryō. He is always in debt. The wife of Jusuké San complains of his delays with her husband. However...."

Confidence restored, she bade Densuké put the money in the drawer of the wardrobe. Then

he was to prepare some food; for themselves, and for the neighbors ready to assist at the expected birth.

Densuké did so, his eyes shifting from Lady Mino to the stove, from the stove to the deadly bundle. Finally he removed the luggage to their outer room, mumbling some excuse as to the foulness of a buck-basket.

He returned to his cooking. Barely tasting some food Lady Mino soon was sound asleep.

Densuké observed her. "Ugly, rich, a very incubus in appearance is the daughter of the house; and yet she takes as husband a spiritless creature, such as is this Densuké. Is it good or bad fortune? How grateful would be her advice." He went to bed himself in the outer room; to spend a hideous night of nightmare in company with the dead Jusuké, who now did taint the air with that indefinable pollution of even the freshest corpse.

Wild visions floated through the brain of Densuké. The neighbors would assemble. The food was ready. Ah! Here comes the wife of Jusuké San. She demands her husband. A moment, and Densuké was stealing from the house entrance into the darkness. The river? Ah! That was it. The canal of Hachōbori was close at hand to Jusuké's own home. It would float him to his very door.

Densuké soon saw himself at the river bank. No one was at hand. Splash! In went the foul burden. There it was again. But now it was Jusuké in person. "Jusuké San! Jusuké San! Pardon! 'Twas not this Densuké who killed you. Seek vengeance of Daihachirō Sama. He is the murderer."

In his terror he lost all fear of being heard. He shouted at the top of his lungs. But Jusuké laid a heavy hand on him.

With one long drawn out groan Densuké — awoke.

Lady Mino was leaning close over him, her face spectre-like with pain. Seeing that he was awake she took away her hand. "What is the matter with you? All night you have been shouting and mumbling in sleep. Just now it was 'Jusuké San! Jusuké San! Daihachirō Sama!' It is indeed a matter of Jusuké San. The time of Mino is at hand; the pains begin. Go at

once to the house of Jusuké, and ask his wife Lady Yoshi to condescend her aid."

Densuké sprang up. An idea flashed into his mind. He would go to Hachōbori and make full confession.

Which was the most important? Lady Yoshi as confessor or as midwife?

With his brain thus puzzled over an answer he started off.

His last injunction to Lady Mino was — "by no means meddle with the bundle of Daihachirō Sama."

There could have been no more direct invitation to her to do so.

For a short time Lady Mino did nothing but eye the strange bundle. Then she was on her knees before it, examining it. "Rain coats as wrapping! And tied with rope: a queer kind of washing. What a strange odour! Pickled daikon?"

She shook it. Something inside went gotsu-gotsu. This was too much for her curiosity. Her old suspicion came back, that Densuké had turned robber.

She poked a little hole in the straw wrapping. Some kind of cloth covering was within; a kimono without doubt. Through its tissue something shone white.

The kitchen knife was close at hand on the brazier. She

reached out, and in a moment the rope was severed.

"Oh! Oh!" Out rolled a head. An arm, two helpless flexible legs were extended before her.

With a scream of horror Lady Mino fell flat on her back.

Lying stretched out she uttered one sharp cry after another.

The neighboring wives came hurrying in, a stream of humanity. "What is wrong? A young wife screams not without

cause. Oh! Oh! Lady Mino San has given birth to a baby and a head. Iya! Head, limbs, body — a monstrous parturition!"

With the woman groaning in the pain of her delivery, the wives in confusion, children flying to summon the men folk, the whole district was in an uproar.

In the midst of the confusion arrived Densuké and the wife of Jusuké. As yet he had not found courage to confess. He was still dithering.

A neighbor greeted him — "Densuké San! Strange things have happened to Lady Mino San. She has given birth to a head and a baby at the same time. Hasten, Densuké San! Hasten!"

Densuké did hasten; but it was to disappear down the nearest byway in headlong flight.

Amazed and confounded the wife of Jusuké proceeded alone to the house; as the first thing to set eyes on the head of her

husband, eyes still open and glaring in death.

With a cry she precipitated herself upon it; took it in her arms. The midwife, summoned in haste, parted infant from mother.

Thus did Lady Iwa San come forth into the world.

The affair was grave.

The coroner was soon on the scene.

Lady Mino with feeble voice told what she knew. "Deign to examine into the affair beyond the surface. My husband Densuké is not the man to commit this crime. Ask the neighbors, who know him. Last night he brought three ryō, given him by Takahashi Daihachirō Sama, the Sakuji Machibugyō of Geishū Kō. He said that it was for important service rendered. There is no doubt that Takahashi San is the murderer. Deign to examine

well; show benevolence.... Ah! This Mino shall have vengeance. For seven lives Daihachirō shall be pursued...."

Her eyes became filled with blood. Her breast heaved painfully in the attempt to get air.

The women around her gave cries of alarm.

Lady Mino sank back in a pool of blood. She had died in the midst of her curse.

Said one present — "This Tōkichi would not be the honoured Sakuji Sama; nay, not for the full seven existences in human form."

The others felt as he did. Even the kenshi drew up his shoulders a little at the frightful mask of the dead woman's face. He could learn but little.

Kyūbei, soon at hand, petitioned for the dead body of Lady Mino and the custody of the infant.

The neighbors corroborated the story of Lady Mino; but Densuké had disappeared.

Daihachirō never had confidence in his agent. His preparations for flight had been made before Densuké's discovery, and almost together with Densuké he had passed out the gate of Geishū Sama, with the seventy ryō provided by Jusuké.

Report being made to the Machibugyō a search was made,

without result. No trace of either man was found.

As for the child born under these auspicious conditions, Kyūbei went at once to Tamiya Matazaémon and made report. With bowed head the old man awaited the decision.

Said Matazaémon — "The name giving is to take place on the seventh night. Kyūbei will not fail to be present." He did not speak further.

Thus the offence of the parents was pardoned in Lady Iwa the infant; the grandchild of a man and woman passing the period of middle age.

CHAPTER 5: THE AFFAIR OF THE SHIBA KIRIDŌSHI

It was 1695. Lady Iwa, a girl of twelve years, could understand what came to her ears.

In dealing with each other the Nipponese are very exact and exacting. The New Year must start with a clean balance sheet for the tradesman — all bills paid and collected. The last night of the dying year, and its

last few hours; this time is the busiest and most anxious.

Zensuké, the clerk of the Shimaya dry goods shop, accompanied by one Jugorō, was passing the Shiba Kiridōshi.

It was 3am, the Hour of the Tiger. Of the two, Jugorō was the fighting man. Jurōzaémon of the Shimaya had provided him with a short sword and sent him as guard to Zensuké, who would have more than three hundred ryō in gold.

Said Jugorō — "Bantō San, whither now? The hour is late."

"It is never late on New Year’s Eve," replied Zensuké tersely. "However, there remains but one account to collect; at Nishikubo. We will hasten."

"Go on ahead," said Jugorō. "A moment here for a necessity."

Thus the two men became separated by nearly a 100 yards.

The district was one of yashiki and temples. The white walls of the former blended with the white carpet of snow on the ground. At any hour it was no busy place; now it was desolate. The high banks of the cutting crowned by woods and approached through the trees, made it an ideal place for a hold-up.

Zensuké hesitated. He slowed his pace to allow his companion to rejoin him. He thought he

saw something move in the darkness close by.

From behind a tree just before him came a samurai. Two others followed this man from the shadows. The heads of all three men were covered by hoods. They wore vizors. "Wait!"

Zensuké stopped in fright.

"What suspicious rascal is this, travelling the quarter at this hour? Probably some clerk making off with his master's

funds. Come now! Give them into better keeping. Low fellow! You are fairly trapped."

Zensuké began to retreat, but two of the men were now behind him. He began to shout for Jugorō.

The latter came up at a run — "Honoured Sirs! This is the Bantō San of the Shimaya of Honjō Itchōme. He is collecting the house bills. Deign not to disturb him—"

"Shut up!" was the reply of the leader. "Another fellow of the same kidney. Look to him." Roughly he thrust his hand into Zensuké's shirt and began to hustle and fumble for the money.

When Jugorō would interfere the two other men prevented him. With fright he saw the money belt of the bantō dangling from the man's hand. The nature of the affair was plain.

"Heigh! Jokes don't go, honoured sirs. We are not suspicious fellows. Condescend to pardon us." As he spoke he took advantage of the negligence of his opponents, their interest in the struggle of Zensuké and their leader, to wrench himself free.

At once his sword was out. Jugorō was of no mean skill. None of his wardsmen could face him.

One man received severe wounds in scalp and face. The other lost part of his hand.

But Jugorō was no match for the odds of two trained soldiers. He was soon cut down.

Meanwhile Zensuké was shouting lustily for aid.

At this period there was a guard called the cross-roads watch. It was mostly composed of oldish men not fit for active service. Such regulations as

there were they observed. These were very severe; but, as with the present day police, kept them to their post. They rarely troubled themselves to patrol their district. From these men there could be little hope of aid.

Just then, however, the train of some lord came in sight. With one hand the leader held Zensuké by the bosom of his robe. The hand holding the money belt was already thrust

in his own bosom. In a moment it would be free. Then Zensuké would go in company with Jugorō to the Yellow Fountain in Hell.

His captor gave a startled cry. "The train of Geishū Sama! Lose no time!" As he wrenched himself away Zensuké sank his teeth deep into the man's hand.

With a howl of pain the fellow made off, exchanging a little finger for the three hundred and

twenty-five ryō in Zensuké's money belt.

The bantō crouched in conventional attitude by the roadside. His distress was plain; the prostrate body of a man evidence of some unusual condition.

A samurai left the passing train and came up to investigate. "Ah! Robbery and murder: follow behind to the cross-roads guards. It is their affair."

With moans and groans Zensuké made his report. He was indignant at the luxury of these watchmen, toasting at their fire.

They noted it; looked at each other and out into the snowy night, and laughed with contempt. For a tradesman's money belt were they to disturb themselves?

They questioned him harshly, in such way as to excuse any further effort on their part.

Surely the thieves by this time were at the other end of Edo.

Two of them, however, did accompany Zensuké to the scene of the hold-up.

Casting an eye over Jugorō's mangled corpse, said one — "A good fight: the occasion has been missed. As perhaps the criminal this man is to be bound. Probably his intent was to run away with the master's funds."

Roughly they seized Zensuké, hustled him back to the guardhouse. Trussed up he had to spend the hours in alarm and fear.

Luckily the kenshi soon appeared. It was New Year’s Eve. No official business would be performed during the three days following. Dead Jugorō could hardly exercise patience and remain as he was for that space of time. So the examination was duly held.

The Shimaya soon secured the body of Jugorō and the release of Zensuké. The latter's evidence was put on record; none too satisfactory, as the concealing zukin prevented any recognition or description of the features of the assailants. He only knew of the cries of impatience at wounds received, and knew that he had left his mark on his own opponent. How then were they to be run down?

The kenshi showed some impatience. Said he to the captain of the cross-roads guards — "Why truss up this man, even though a tradesman? He has all his own fingers, and the corpse lacks none." He touched the severed finger with his baton.

With this all were dismissed, and to all seeming the affair was forgotten.

The Tokugawa had their plain-clothes police. One of the most

noted was Magomé Yaémon of Hachōbori. His great grandfather had captured Marubashi Chuya, of note in the rebellion of Yui Shosetsu at the time of the fourth Shogun Iyetsuna Kō.

One day this Magomé Dono, in company with a constable named Kuma, was rummaging the poorer districts of Shitaya Hirokōji. The two men were disguised as charcoal burners, and attracted little attention.

All the legitimate profession in the way of medicine and pharmacy had been ransacked by the magistrate of the south district. Yaémon felt sure that there were still some by-ways.

"Who's that fellow?" he asked Kuma.

The constable laughed. "He's a surgeon. The rascals can be told by their tough dark blue cotton socks, the coarse straw sandals, and the banded leggings. Deign to note the long staff he carries.

They peddle plasters — healing plasters, guaranteed to cure any wound, to stop any flow of blood. A man's arm hangs but by a strip of skin; the blood flows in torrents. Apply the plaster and the flow ceases at once, the arm heals. They drive a roaring trade, even among the samurai; selling a shell here, two there. As for their real usefulness...." He laughed.

They followed after the man and soon came to a guard house.

Said Magomé San — "Detain that man yonder. He is to be examined."

The neighborhood officer was a little surprised — "Respectfully heard and understood. It is old Yamabayashi Yōgen."

Soon the man entered the guard house.

Said the official drily — "Magomé Dono is here to talk with Yōgen. What has he been up to?"

But the old fellow was confident. "Thanks are felt." With the ease of the righteous and prosperous he passed into the presence of Yaémon. The latter greeted him with a non-official genial smile.

"Ah! This is Yamabayashi Yōgen, the head of the Sunékiri. And business?" —

"Truly this Yōgen is grateful. Man was born with teeth. Men and women still seek each other's company. So long as

such endures Yōgen finds profit." —

"And plasters?"

"They are the affair of Tōkichi. Would his worship deign to examine him … condescend dismissal. At once he presents himself."

Thus in short order the straight haired, unshaven, low browed Tōkichi stuck his head into the Sanbashi guard house.

"Deign to pardon this Tōkichi. The honoured benevolence...."

The neighborhood officer eyed him knowingly and quizzically. "Shut up! Magomé Dono has questions to ask about clients. Wait until the questions deal with the doings of Tōkichi. That will be well. Then it will be time enough to lie. Meanwhile, be sure and tell the truth."

With this disinterested advice Tōkichi was passed to the presence. Once more

conscience spoke louder than caution.

"The honoured benevolence, the honoured pity; condescend the honoured examination into the innocence of Tōkichi."

Yaémon laughed. "Fortunately it is not a matter of Tōkichi, but of his plasters. Who bought these at this year's New Year? Be careful in answer. The case is a bad one."

Tōkichi considered. "The first day of the New Year a man came. His purchase of salve was large. In the course of the past three months he has been many times to buy. His visits now are wider spaced, and he praises the goods — as he ought. No hand ever had a worse poisoned wound. He —"

"Age and appearance?" interrupted Yaémon, now all attention. He had struck a trail.

"Perhaps fifty years; fair of complexion, tall, and stout. By his lordly manner he must at least be a go-kenin, or a charlatan."

Who was this man? Yaémon felt sure that he was about to learn something of interest.

Kuma was given his instructions. "Go daily to the shop of this man and receive his report. As to the samurai in question be circumspect. Evidently he is no ordinary

person. A samurai is to be summoned, not disgraced by arrest — if he is a samurai."

So Kuma with several aides established himself in the rear of Tōkichi's shop.

The man not having put in an appearance for several weeks, the wait, if uncertain, was soon rewarded.

On the 25th day of May he presented himself.

Kuma recognized him at once by the description; sooner than Tōkichi, who was engaged in filling his little shells with the marvellous salve. The officer's decision was prompt.

At a call Tōkichi turned from his drugs. "Ah! the honoured Sir. And the arm, does it honourably progress?"

"Progress could not be better. This is probably the last visit." In replying the man eyed

Tōkichi with some astonishment.

The latter made his bows, first to the newcomer, then to the indefinite rear of the establishment.

The man said, "Indeed the drug is all that is claimed for it. The wound being poisoned, at one time it looked as if the hand, nay arm, must go. These House doctors are notoriously good for nothing. Just as nothing can surpass your product, good

leech. Here is money for two shells of its virtues." He held out a silver quarter-ryō.

Busied with his preparations Tōkichi looked in vain toward the rear apartment. After as long delay as he could contrive he passed the shells and a heap of copper change over to the customer.

As soon as the latter had left the shop Tōkichi bolted for the rear. Kuma was gone. His aides were calmly smoking their pipes and

drinking the meager tea of Tōkichi.

Kuma had little trouble in following his man to Okachimachi in Shitaya. He found near by a shop for the sale of everything, from tobacco to raddishes, both odoriferous, yet lacking perfume.

Said Kuma — "A question or so: this tall samurai, an oldish man, who lives close by; who is he?"

The woman in charge hesitated. Then dislike overcame discretion. "Ah! With the hand wrapped in a bandage; his name is Sakurai Kichirō Tayu. Truly he is a bad man. That he should quarrel with his own class is no great matter. Maimed as he is, thrice report has been made to the guard house, but in each case he has escaped further process. He is a dreadful fellow; one who never pays a debt, yet to whom it is dangerous to refuse credit. Already nearly a

ryō is due to this Echigoya. It has been the bad luck to support him and his family during the past six months."

Said Kuma — "Thus maimed, to hold his own in quarrels he must be a notable fencer as well as brawler. Was the wound so received?"

"Iya! That is not known. Some quarrel at the New Year's festivities probably was the cause. Before that time he was sound enough." She laughed.

"He has two friends; Kahei San and Miemon San. They are birds of a feather; and all partly plucked. Perhaps they quarrelled in company, but if so have made it up. Sakurai San is a match for the two others."

She looked at Kuma, to see if he had more to say.

Indifferent he picked out a strand of tobacco. "He shouldered this Gōbei into the ditch close by here. Fortunate is it to have escaped worse injury."

Satisfied with his inquiries he took his way in haste to his master.

The eyes of Yaémon and his aid shone with enjoyment. Surely they had the men of the Shiba Kiridōshi.

Magomé Yaémon at once sought out the machibugyō's office.

His lordship heard the report. "Different disorders require different treatment. Of two of these men this Gemba knows

something. The other man is hard to place, and evidently not so easy to deal with."

Two dōshin and yakunin were sent at once to the addresses indicated. To capture Nakagawa Miemon and Imai Kahei was an easy task.

The dōshin and yakunin sent to the house of Sakurai formed a band of twenty men.

The house surrounded, without ceremony the officer and an aid

entered. "On the lord's mission: Sakurai San is wanted at the office of Matsuda Dono. If resistance be made it will be necessary to use the rope. Pray accompany me."

Sakurai Kichirō divined the object of the arrest. "The affair at the Kiridōshi has been scented out. The manner of that rascally drug seller was strange to-day."

The officer had planted himself right before the sword rack.

Sakurai could neither kill anybody, nor cut belly.

He turned to his wife. "There is a matter on hand to be explained. Absence will probably be prolonged. Already the day is far advanced.... Ah! Is it Kichitarō?" A boy of seven years had rushed into the room. "Pretty fellow!... Honoured Sir, be patient. The separation is no short one. No resistance is made. We go the same road....

Tarō; rude fellow! Salute the gentleman."

The boy obeyed, with grave ceremony and a hostility which divined an unpleasant mission.

"Your father leaves you. It is now the time to obey the mother in all she says. Remember well, or the end will be a bad one."

Wife and child clung to him, frightened and now weeping. It was an arrest; their mainstay was being taken from them.

In the last caresses he had time to bend down and whisper to Lady Ren — "In the wardrobe box is a scroll sealed up. All is there explained. Read and destroy it. In later days at discretion let our son know."

Roughly he pushed woman and boy aside. With rapid stride he reached the entrance. The yakunin confronted him.

He laughed and waved a hand. "There is no resistance. We go the same road."

The dōshin permitted the laxity of discipline. He had his orders.

Meanwhile the examination of the other two men was in progress at the office of the machibugyō.

As the biggest fool of the two, Nakagawa Miemon was the first summoned to the presence of Matsuda Dono.

Said the Judge — "Nakagawa Uji, there is a slight inquiry to make. How were those scars on

the face come by? These are marks of wounds not long since received. Consider well and remember."

The tone of menace staggered Miemon. He had anticipated some rebuke for slight infraction of the peace, not unusual with these men. "Naruhodo! Has the Shiba Kiridōshi matter cropped up?"

He hesitated — "The story is a long one, and a foolish one. To weary the honoured ears...."

Matsuda Gemba caught him up with impatient gesture. "Answer the question, and truly. Nakagawa Miemon is noted neither for judgment nor sobriety."

The man caught up the last phrase as a cue. Eagerly he spoke, the doors of the jail opening wide for exit — "So it is indeed. Wine never benefited man; much less a samurai. Hence, with Kahei and Sakurai Uji, it was decided to forswear

wine forever. It was determined to make a pilgrimage to Kompira San. There the vow of abstinence was to be taken; on its holy ground. All went well. We met at Nihonbashi. Alas! At the Kyōbashi the perfume of a grog shop reached our noses. The vow had not yet been taken. The ground was not holy. Just one last drink before setting out. But the Buddha was unfavourable. Once begun, the drinking was adjourned to a cook shop. There the bout

continued all day. Wine lent us the wings of tengu. We travelled the road to Kompira San in a dream. In the progress Kahei and this Miemon quarrelled. Swords were drawn, and we cut each other. These wounds on head and face were the portion of this Miemon. Kahei had his hand nearly severed. Sakurai San, who was asleep, aroused by the noise, sprang up to part us. He is a man to be feared; but in my rage I sank my teeth in his hand. The bite of man or

beast is poison. His wound was worse than that of either of us."

Gemba Dono was in conversation with his chamberlain. He let Miemon talk away. He was not one to say too little.

As barely having listened he asked — "When was this fight? The day of the vow and journey to Kompira? Truly the result has been the vengeance of offended deity."

"The twelfth month tenth day," naturally replied Miemon.

Gemba forced him to repeat the answer.

Several times he put the query in different forms.

Miemon, fool that he was, stuck to the date.

Then said the magistrate — "Miemon, you are a liar. Moreover, you are a murderer. On the 13th day, on going up to the castle, this Gemba had

converse with your lord. At that time Nakagawa Miemon was summoned to carry out a mission. As a man of whom report had been made you were noted well. At that time you had no wound.... Tie him up, and take him away."

The yakunin fell on him from all sides. In a trice he was trussed up and removed.

Then appeared Imai Kahei. Kahei was cunning, but also a coward.

To the questions of the machibugyō he procrastinated in his answers, confused them all he could. What had Miemon said?

"He spoke of the eloquence of Imai San; of Kahei Uji as the clever man, the one to tell the tale properly. Now let us have the true statement of the case."

Such was Gemba's reply. It was flattering.

Unable to help himself Kahei set sail on his sea of lies. "We all like wine…."

"Ah! After all you are agreed." Gemba smiled pleasantly.

Kahei took courage — "But wine costs money. Together we went to Kuraya Jibei, a money-lender living at Kuramae no Saka, as is well known."

Gemba nodded assent. "Of him two ryō were borrowed, on agreement to repay ten ryō as

interest within a month. The nearest grog shop was sought, and it was 11pm, the Hour of the Rat, before the return was started. At the Teobashi a band of drunkards was encountered. Without cause these men forced a quarrel on us. Thus was the hand of Kahei nearly severed. This is the truth."

"And what was the date of this money bond?"

Imai hesitated. He had caught a glimpse of the drug seller

Tōkichi on being brought into the place. Without doubt the Kiridōshi affair was in question. He must antedate his wound.

"Kahei does not remember with certainty. Perhaps it was the seventeenth day; before the Kwannon festival of the eighteenth day." He mumbled, and was frightened.

Said Gemba sharply — "Speak distinctly; the seventeenth day?" —

"Yes! Yes! Some time in the last decade of the month; the nineteenth or twentieth day — not later; not later."

Matsuda Gemba almost leaped at him. "Oh, you liar! On the last day of the year you came, in person, to this Gemba to anticipate the New Year's gift. At that time you had no wound. Yet the drug seller sees you next day with maimed hand. It was not at Teobashi, but at Shiba Kiridōshi, that the wound was

received.... Tie him up, and away with him."

The yakunin came forward. Imai made a spasmodic attempt to rise. They threw him down, and in a moment he was keeping company with Nakagawa Miemon.

Gemba Dono braced himself for the more serious task. So did his yakunin.

A glance showed the magistrate that he had mistaken his man.

Sakurai Kichirō came forward with calm and dignity.

Making his ceremonial salutation to the judge he came at once to the point. "What lies Miemon and Kahei have told, this Kichirō knows not. The fact is that we three plotted together to rob the fatly supplied purses of the bantō making their rounds in settlement of accounts at the close of the year. Hence the bantō of the Shimaya, Zensuké, lost his

money belt, and a man of the same stamp, one Jugorō, was killed. All three of us are guilty of the murder...."

As he would proceed Gemba held up his hand. "Bring in the other two men. Continue, Kichirō."

Said Sakurai — "Miemon was badly cut about the head and face. Kahei nearly lost his hand. This Kichirō would have killed the clerk, but the procession of Geishū Sama came in sight, and

recognition was feared. Of the three hundred and twenty-five ryō secured...."

The eyes of Nakagawa and Imai stood out. Aghast they had followed the confession of Sakurai Kichirō, with full intention to deny its truth. Now they were in a fury.

"What! Three hundred and twenty-five ryō! And we had but ten ryō apiece. You jest, Sakurai Uji.... Oh! The low fellow! The villain! A very beast! A swine!"

Gemba Dono could ask for nothing more. With smiling face and courtesy he turned to Sakurai Kichirō. "Why did Kichirō take the three hundred ryō, giving to these fellows such a paltry sum?"

Answered Kichirō — "As deserving no more. They are paltry fellows; little better than common soldiers. But there is more to tell, now the end is reached. The true name of Sakurai Kichirō is Takahashi

Daihachirō, at one time a retainer of Matsudaira Aki no Kami. Pressed by the money lender Jusuké, I killed him and had the body disposed of by one Densuké, the cook at the soldiers' quarters of the yashiki. This was in June 1683. Fleeing to avoid arrest the occupation of writing teacher was taken up at Yūki in Shimosa. Densuké, too, had fled, and hither he came as a wandering beggar. Fearing his tongue I killed him; and mutilating the corpse, threw it

into the castle moat close by. A beggar found dead, no inquiry was made."

"When did this take place?" asked Gemba.

"Just one year later — Jōkyō 1st year 5th month." He made a little movement.

Nakagawa and Imai broke out into protest at the completeness of this confession, but Sakurai turned fiercely on them.

"Shut up! To undergo public trial would bring shame on all kerai throughout the land; would cause people to fear our caste. We three planned the deed and secured the money." He put his arms behind his back.

The yakunin, stepping softly, roped him up almost with respect.

A wave of Gemba's hand and the guilty men were removed. Unable to help themselves,

Nakagawa and Imai made confession to avoid the torture in what was now a hopeless case. Later the sentences of condemnation were issued.

Degraded from their status the three men were taken to the execution ground of Shinagawa, and there decapitated.

The wife of Takahashi Daihachirō did not wait these proceedings. The confession of her husband was in her hands before he himself told

everything to Matsuda Gemba. Before night she had decamped with her son.

At eight years of age Kichitarō was placed as disciple at the Jōshinji of Fukagawa.

Receiving the name of Myōshin he became the favourite of the rector of the temple. The mother now became reduced to the greatest penury. For a time she was bawd in the Honjō Warigesui district.

Subsequently she was promoted to the position of favourite wife of her master Toémon, local head of his profession. Her name now was Lady Matsu.

When Myōshin was thirteen years old in some way he was told that she was dead. Henceforth he had no stay in the world but the worthy priest, who became a second and better father to him. This treatment found its usual and virtuous reward.

At eighteen years, now a priest and learned in priestly ways, he took to himself the contents of the temple strong box.

Fifty ryō soon disappeared in the company of the harlots of Fukagawa Yagura-Shita.

A prolonged absence of Myōshin aroused the inquiries of the other monks, and the eyes of the rector were soon opened as to his unworthy proselyte, the blighted issue of a miserable stock.

CHAPTER 6: NEGOTIATIONS: THE BUSINESS OF A MARRIAGE BROKER

The presence of Lady Iwa created an upheaval in the Samonchō household.

The wet nurse required brought with her a train of servants. With the child's growth this was maintained, even increased. The young lady found herself

graduated into one with a status to maintain.

All the miserly habits of Matazaémon were thrown to the winds with the advent of this grandchild. The affection never shown outwardly to the mother, was lavished on her daughter.

At seven years of age Lady Iwa underwent the common enough infliction of smallpox. It showed itself on the anniversary day of Lady Mino's death, and the child's sickness afforded but

mutilated rites for the memorial service of the mother.

Matazaémon would have abandoned all his duties, himself to nurse the child.

Lady Naka loved Lady Iwa for self and daughter. She had sense enough to drive the old man into a corner of the room, then out of it; and further expostulations sent him to his duties. Who, in those iron days, would accept such excuse for absence?

The child worried through, not unscathed. Her grandmother's qualifications as nurse have been mentioned.

Lady Iwa was an ugly child. She had the flat plate-like face of her mother. The eyes were small, disappearing behind the swollen eyelids, the hair was scanty, the disease added its black pock marks which stood thick and conspicuous on a fair skin. Otherwise she was spared by its ravages, except —

Whatever her looks Lady Iwa compensated for all by her disposition.

She had one of those balanced even temperaments, with clear judgment, added to a rare amiability. Moreover she possessed all the accomplishments and discipline of a lady.

At eleven years Matazaémon unwillingly had sought and found a place for her in

attendance on her ladyship of the great Hosokawa House.

Lady Iwa's absence made no difference in his household. The train of servants was maintained, to be disciplined for her return, to be ready on this return.

Perhaps it was a pleasing fiction to the fond mind of the aging man that she would return, soon, to-morrow.

Lady Naka acquiesced in the useless expense and change in her habits. She always acquiesced; yet her own idea would have been to make a good housekeeper of Lady Iwa — like herself, to sew, cook, wash, clean — a second Lady Mino. She could not understand the new turn of Matazaémon's mind.

As for Lady Iwa, she grew to girlhood in the Hosokawa House, learned all the

accomplishments of her own house and what the larger scale of her new position could teach her; everything in the way of etiquette and the polite arts, as well as the plainer tasks of housekeeping, she was likely ever to be called on to perform.

The ugly child grew into the ugly woman; perhaps fortunately for her. Her ladyship was a jealous woman. Her spouse was mad on women. Every nubile maid in the yashiki

was a candidate for concubinage. His wife countered by as hideous a collection of females as her own House and her lord's retainers could furnish. Lady Iwa attracted from the first by her lack of all physical attraction.

His lordship tried to get used to her with the passage of years — and failed. He could not stomach the necessary advances.

But the girl's admirable temper and even judgment secured the esteem of all. These latter qualities captivated the whole household.

It was Lady Iwa who performed all duties for her ladyship, took them in charge as her substitute.

For the first time in his life Oki no Kami found something in a woman apart from her sex. When the time came for Lady Iwa to depart, the regret of lord

and lady was substantially expressed in their gifts.

But his lordship had to admit failure. Not a retainer could be found willing to take the daughter of Tamiya as wife. So far Lady Iwa's mission at the yashiki had failed. Lady Naka knew this.

Matazaémon never gave it thought; so glad he was to get her back. He received the honoured words and presents

with humble and delighted thanks.

Lady Iwa reentered her home, a recovered jewel. She was the daughter of the house, the lady daughter.

A first step of hers was gradually to get rid of a good part of the superfluous train. Lady Iwa was a very practical girl.

Matazaémon was now old and ill. He was nearing his seventieth year.

The one idea in his head was the heir, the son to be adopted as husband of the daughter of the House; the mate to be secured for Lady Iwa, and the posterity to be secured for his House.

As a little girl Lady Iwa had been much courted — in fun.

Watanabé Juzō, Natsumé Kyuzō, Imaizumi Jinzaémon, many others the growing sparks of Samonchō and roundabout, could not forbear this amusement with the little demon, as they saw her.

Of their ill intent Lady Iwa knew nothing. Indeed a short experience with Lady Iwa disarmed derision. Most of the unseemly lovers came genuinely to like the girl, unless inherent malice and ugliness of

disposition, as with Natsumé and Akiyama Chōzaémon, made their sport more than mere pastime.

But as grown men they could not face the results of the final step, and no parent was harsh enough to graft his unwilling stock on Lady Iwa's persimmon trees.

The girl was clever enough to know this.

It was 1709 and she was now twenty-six years old.

It was indirectly at her suggestion that Matazaémon sought the aid of Kondō Rokurōbei. This man lived just behind the large inclosure of the Sainenji, on the hill slope which dips steeply down to the Samégabashi.

The relationship was very distant at best; but with nearer relatives in general, and with Yoémon his brother in

particular, the master of Tamiya had deadly feud. To them he would not turn to find a husband for Lady Iwa.

Thus it happened that one day in August Rokurōbei was awaiting the appearance of Yamada Chōbei.

He really knew little about the man, but Chōbei at one time had been resident in the neighborhood. He had undergone vicissitudes, and now was a dealer in metals and

a kind of broker in everything under the sign of Musashiya.

He had a wide acquaintance over Edo in his different businesses, and was the easy and slip-shod means by which Rokurōbei would avoid the more arduous part of the task laid on him by Matazaémon.

Chōbei was not long in putting in an appearance. All affairs were gifts of the gods to a man who lived on wind.

Kazaguruma Chōbei — Windmill Chōbei — he was called. His flittings were so noiseless and erratic, just like the little paper windmills made for children, that the nickname applied exactly fitted him.

The maid in announcing him showed no particular politeness. "Wait here a moment.... Danna Sama, Chōbei San, the metal dealer, requests an interview."

"Ah! Pass him here at once.... Is it Chōbei? Please sit down."

Chōbei had followed almost on the girl's footsteps. She drew aside to make room for him, then flirted out in haste. Poverty and dislike had no influence in Yotsuya in those days. She seemed to scent the man.

Chōbei looked with envy at the comfortable Rokurōbei. The day was hot. The thin kimono fallen about his loins, the latter's garb was a pair of drawers and a thin shirt. He sat looking out on the garden, with its shade of large

trees, its shrubbery and rock work. Everything was dripping with the water industriously splashed to this side and to that by the serving man.

The tea was brought and Kondō at last remembered that he had a guest. As he turned —

"It is a long time since a visit has been paid. Deign to pardon the intrusion." Chōbei sighed in making this remark.

The irony was lost on his fat host. As Rokurōbei seemed unwilling, or hardly to know how to impart the subject concerning which he had summoned him, Chōbei continued — "And the honoured health, is it good? The honoured business, is it on some matter of moment that Chōbei is summoned?"

Rokurōbei woke up under the direct question. He, too, sighed.

Chōbei was noted for a greed which inspired fear. For money he would do anything. "Blindman Chōbei" had been his nickname of old days in the neighborhood. Kondō remembered this.

He liked money, too. It brought in so much comfort. He hated to part with comfort. It was to be a question between himself and Chōbei how much of his hard-earned commission was to be parted with.

This last thought completely aroused him. "It is a matter of securing an heir. This Rokurōbei is the one charged with the task. As a son-in-law outside the neighborhood is desired, no one has wider circulation and better opportunities than Chōbei San. Hence the desire for a consultation."

Chōbei whistled inwardly. Outside the neighborhood! What was wrong with the case. Here was coin to be turned up

by the circumspect. "Surely there are young fellows enough in Samonchō, fit to be heir. Of course with impediments…."

"It is the daughter of Tamiya; Lady Iwa San. Matazaémon Dono has commissioned this Rokurōbei to secure an heir."

Chōbei whistled outwardly. "For Lady Iwa San!…"

"She is no beauty, as Chōbei evidently knows. Wealth compensates for other

deficiencies. At all events his aid is desired."

"For how much?" Chōbei spoke bluntly. If Rokurōbei had forgotten Chōbei, Chōbei had not forgotten Rokurōbei. He went on — "To get a price for damaged goods is no sinecure. Fortunately she is only out of repair on the surface.... Say ten ryō?"

Kondō laughed scornfully — "And they call Chōbei 'the Blind-man'! Rather is it vision

magnified. The entertainment should be the reward; with what Chōbei collects from the happy bridegroom."

Chōbei replied gravely — "With such a wealthy connection the future of Kondō Dono is to be envied. Chōbei has to realize his future at once. Not a ryō less can he afford."

Plainly he was in earnest, as was the long conversation which followed.

Finally Chōbei emerged with partial success, and half the sum named as stipend for his labours.

He began them at once. The next day he was at the metal market in Kanda. In course of chaffering over wares he never bought — "You fellows always have some rōnin in train; a fine, handsome fellow for whom a wife is needed. Application is made. Jinzaémon, you have a candidate."

"Not for the kind of wife Chōbei San provides." Those present laughed loudly at the sally.

Chōbei did not wink. He explained. "No bad provision is this one. Rich, with an income of thirty tawara, a fine property in reversion, and but twenty-five years old. The man therefore must be fit to pose as a samurai; able to read and write, to perform official duty, he must be neither a boy nor a man so old as to be incapable. Come now!

Does no one come forward? Rōnin are to be had. A ryō for aid to this Chōbei."

"Too cheap as an offer," was Jinzaémon's retort. "A rōnin is one to be handled with care. Those favoured with acquaintance of the honoured samurai often part with life and company at the same date. Those without lords are equally testy as those in quarters." He spoke with the bluntness of the true Edokko, the peculiar

product of the capital; men who were neither farmers nor provincials, but true descendants of the men of the guild of Bandzuin Chōbei.

He jested, but the subject interested the crowd.

Said one — "Does Chōbei San get the ryō out of groom or bride? She is a bold wench, unmarried at that age; and none too chaste eh, Chōbei San? She will provide the husband with wife and child to hand, or in the

making. Or, are matters the other way? Has she been tried and found wanting? Is she impotent, or deformed; or is Chōbei making fools of us?"

Answered Chōbei slowly — "No; she is a little ugly. The face round and flat, shining, with black pock marks, making it look like speckled pumice, rouses suspicion of leprosy. This, however, is not the case. At all events she is a woman."

All were now roaring with laughter — "A very beauty indeed! Just the one for Chōbei's trade! Too honied was his speech. He would market anything. But in this market it is a matter of hard cash; without credit. This is a bit of goods too wilted. Even Chōbei cannot sell it."

"You lie!" said Chōbei in a towering passion. "At the first hint of ill-fortune threatening wine supply or pleasure, there

is not one of you who would not turn to Chōbei to find the money needed. Sisters, daughters, wives, aunts ... mothers are for sale." He was choking with rage. "Sell her? Chōbei can and will."

Angered by the final item on his family list, a man nearby gave him a sharp poke in the back. Others voiced resentment, perhaps would have given it material form. The canal was

spoken of. Chōbei took the hint. He did not wait for a ducking.

At a sharp pace he trotted off toward his tenement at Asakusa Hanagawadō. For a while he would avoid the metal market.

He regretted his display of temper. It was in the necessities of other trades that he found the material of his own, and flourished.

In plain terms Kazaguruma Chōbei was a pimp for the

Yoshiwara and kindred quarters. His other occupations were mere channels accessory to this main business. Hence his seasons of increase and decline. Just now he was in a period of decline.

His eagerness in this Tamiya affair was sharpened. Pushing his way through the Kuramae of Asakusa suddenly a hopeful light came into his eye. Abruptly he made his way to the side of the roadway.

Here boarding covered the ditch, removing the occupant of a booth erected thereon, and would-be clients, from the passing stream of humanity.

There was a table in the booth, and on it were several books, a vessel containing water, brushes, scrolls for writing, and a box containing divining sticks. It was the stand of a strolling fortune-teller.

At the time the occupant was engaged in gathering together

his professional apparatus, with the evident purpose to decamp.

Chōbei did not delay in accosting him. "Ah! The Sensei; Kazuma Uji finds the day too hot to pry into the future. Does the Sensei leave his clients to their fate, or have the clients abandoned the Sensei? Deign to come along with Chōbei. Perhaps he, too, can tell fortunes. At all events the wife has been forewarned; the bath

is ready. It will put life into both of us."

The young man laughed and hastened his operations, nodding assent — "Thanks are felt, Chōbei San. Indeed this Kazuma has but to continue the art of prophecy if he would foretell his own fate. No one will buy the future when money is so needed for the present. Besides this is a pleasure ground. Men have no hankering to learn of possible worse luck than being

here. All the fools have died — except their prophet." He shouldered his scanty apparatus, and with rapid stride the two men pushed their way up the crowded street toward the great gate of the temple.

In his haste Chōbei yet had time to eye, from time to time, his companion, always gaining encouragement from the palpable seediness made more plain by a handsome person.

The two were neighbors in a house-row of the Hanagawadō, that poverty-stricken district along the river close to the great amusement ground, and furnishing those who perform its baser tasks.

On arrival Chōbei called out — "Lady Taki! Lady Taki! The bath, is it ready? The Sensei, Kazuma San, honours us with his company. Make all ready for his reception.... Sensei, condescend to enter; please come up."

Yanagibara Kazuma dropped his clogs in the vestibule. As he entered the room — "Pray pardon the intrusion. This Kazuma feels much in the way. He is continually putting his neighbors of the nagaya to inconvenience; too great the kindness of Chōbei San and wife."

Lady Taki laughed deprecatingly. Truly this was a handsome young man.

In 1709 Yanagibara Kazuma was twenty-one years of age.

Lady Taki was thirty odd.

She appreciated masculine beauty all the more.

Chōbei grunted from heat and the merest trace of discomfiture. He had his limit, even in his business.

Quickly he shook off his kimono, and fan in hand squatted in his loin cloth. "Ah! 'Tis hot beyond

endurance. Business is bad — from Yoshiwara to Yotsuya."

Lady Taki looked up at the last word.

He continued — "The Sensei takes precedence. Kazuma Uji, deign to enter the bath. All is ready?"

His wife nodded assent.

Kazuma followed the example of Chōbei. In a trice he was naked as his mother bore him.

Chōbei burst out into phrases of admiration — "What a splendid fellow! Ah! Waste of material! If a woman Kazuma San would be a fortune to himself and to Chōbei.... Taki, note the skin of the Sensei. It has the texture of the finest paper. How regrettable!" He drew back for the better inspection of the sum total of his subject's charms.

Lady Taki drew closer for the same purpose.

Chōbei sighed — "It is plain enough that Kazuma San is not a woman. An error of Nature! Somehow the age at which a woman becomes of use, is that at which a boy becomes a mere burden. He is fit for nothing but to be a story-teller.... And you, Taki, what are you about?"

The lady of his affections was far advanced in the process of disrobing.

She protested. "Does not the Sensei need aid in the bath?

How cleanse the back, the shoulders. This Taki would aid him."

"Immodest wench!" bellowed Chōbei. "The Sensei needs no such aid. Why! You ... Taki ... one would take you for a charcoal ball, so dark your skin. Nay! For two of them, for a cluster piled in a box, so round the buttocks and belly. The Sensei wants no aid from such an ugly jade. This Chōbei can do what is needed; with as much

skill and better purpose than a woman."

Kazuma modestly interposed in this incipient quarrel between husband and wife. "Nay, the matter is of no importance. Kazuma is grateful for such kindness, but aid is not needed. His arm is long." He held it out, almost simian in proportion and slenderness, the one proportional defect of this handsome body.

The quarrel of Chōbei and Lady Taki lapsed before his pleasant smile.

Seated over tea said Chōbei — "This Chōbei, too, has claimed to be a diviner. Don't deny it. The Sensei at one time has been a priest."

Kazuma looked at him with surprise, even misgiving.

Explained Chōbei — "The manner in which the Sensei takes up the cup betrays him; in

both hands, with a little waving of the vessel and shake of the head. The rust of the priest's garb clings close."

Said Kazuma — "Chōbei San is a clever fellow. It is true. At one time I was priest."

"Whereabouts?" asked Chōbei.

"At the Reigan of Fukagawa," replied the fortune teller.

"Ah! Reiganji; and later would return to the life of a samurai. Such pose and manner

possessed by the Sensei are only gained in good company. He would reassume the status. This Chōbei was not always as he is. Wine, women, gambling, have brought him to pimping. The buying of geisha and jorō cost the more as they imply the other two vices. Wife, status, fortune; all are gone. Such has been Chōbei's fate."

"Not the only case of the kind," grumbled his partner in

concubinage. "And the wife, what has become of her?"

"None of Taki's affair, as she is no longer an issue. Would the jade be jealous?" He glowered at her. "But Kazuma San, this Chōbei is not only diviner, to tell fortunes. He can make them."

Kazuma laughed. "Don't joke. Chōbei San's line of business has already cost this Kazuma fortune and position."

"To secure a better one. Kazuma San is a wandering samurai, a man of education, and of fine appearance. He is just the one to become an heir."

"In some tradesman's family?" The samurai spoke with disdain.

Said Chōbei eagerly — "No: Chōbei prophesied the return of Kazuma Uji to his own caste."

"At what cost?" said Kazuma coolly. "The honour of a samurai cannot stand open taint.

Kazuma has no desire to cut belly at too early a date, to save the situation for others. Has the woman erred, and is the father's sword dulled?"

"It is no such case," answered Chōbei. "The parents, rather grandparents, are fools in pride. The girl is twenty-five years old, rich, and, one must admit, not too good looking. It is by a mere chance, a former connection, that the affair comes into Chōbei's hands. As Kazuma Uji

knows, it is not much in his line. Let us share the good luck together."

"Is she a monster; one of those long-necked, pop-eyed rokurokubi?"

"That can be determined at the meeting," said the cautious Chōbei. "She is somewhat pock-marked, as with others. It is a matter of luck. Chōbei's position forces him to fall back on Kazuma San as the only likely

man to recommend. Deign not to refuse to come to his aid."

"Rich, and granddaughter of people old in years." He eyed Chōbei quizzically.

The latter nodded agreement.

"No matter what her looks, this Kazuma accepts with thanks — unless this be a jest of Chōbei San."

Chōbei slightly coughed — "There is a commission...."

"Ah! Then the foundation is rock. As to commission, assuredly; Kazuma is not rich, nor in funds."

"But will be. At ten ryō it is a cheap affair."

"Agreed," replied the diviner carelessly. "The money will be paid."

"With the delivery of the goods." Chōbei now was all gaiety.

"Of the Rokurokubi, the monster with sextuple lengthed neck,"

laughed Kazuma Sensei as he took his leave.

He was engaged to meet Chōbei the next day at the house of Kondō Rokurōbei in Yotsuya.

CHAPTER 7: IÉMON APPEARS

In his difficult mission Kondō Rokurōbei had hopes of Chōbei; but not much more.

It was with no small pleasure that he heard the announcement of his visit the next morning.

The maid was a shade more civil — "Please wait."

Kondō was decidedly so. He greeted Chōbei with an effusion

which Chōbei noted. The tea brought, the two men faced each other over the cups.

To Kondō's inquiring look Chōbei said — "Honoured master the task is a difficult one."

He retailed his experience at the Kanda market.

Kondō was somewhat discomfited. He had put a different interpretation on the early visit of Chōbei.

Continued the latter — "A difficult task, but not hopeless. Surely five ryō is very small remuneration."

Kondō's eye lit up. Chōbei had his man. "It is all this Kondō is qualified to give. Chōbei knows Tamiya Dono. After all it is he who pays, and Chōbei can claim but his share. However, the matter is not urgent. A bad turn with Matazaémon, and Lady Naka will be much easier to deal with ... unless it be Yoémon

who interposes." He made a wry face; joined in by Chōbei.

Kondō went on — "It is matter of regret to have troubled you. The parents of Natsumé Kyuzō show signs of breaking off present negotiations and coming round to us. This is a matter of yesterday, and on hearing that the affair of Lady Iwa San was definitely in the hands of Rokurōbei."

Chōbei was frightened. Was this the cause of Kondō's joy? Had

he misinterpreted on his entrance?

He put out a hand, as if to stop the talk of his host. "Deign to allow the money question to stand as agreed. Such step would put this Chōbei in an awkward position. The man is found, and soon will be here. Probably even Kondō Dono will be satisfied."

"Who is he?" asked Kondō.

"One Yanagibara Kazuma. He has practised divination at Asakusa…."

"A charlatan! A quack doctor! Chōbei, are you mad?" Rokurōbei pushed back his cushion and his cue in horror. Not a word did he say of Natsumé Kyuzō.

Chōbei smiled. He had been trapped; but he had detected Kondō. "Don't be alarmed. The man is a rōnin, his divination of small account and due to

temporary stress. Kondō Dono will soon judge of the man by his appearance. Let the subject of Kazuma San be dropped — with that of Natsumé San. Our bargain has been made firm."

Kondō looked down. He felt a little injured.

Continued Chōbei — "For his man Chōbei cannot answer if all be known. Pray follow my plan, and precede us to the house of Matazaémon. He must not see Lady Iwa at this juncture.

Tamiya Dono is ill and not visible. The aunt is wise enough to do as she is told. Years have drilled that into her. Lady Iwa has taken cold. Her hair is loose and she cannot think of appearing. Make this known when the time comes to serve the wine. Meanwhile send her off on some mission; to the house of Akiyama, or that of the newly-wed Imaizumi."

"But the man must see the girl," protested Kondō.

Answered Chōbei — "He must see the property. It is with that Chōbei intends he shall become enamoured. He is not to see the girl until she is his wife. To keep the estate he will cleave to the woman. Trust Chōbei for a knowledge of men's hearts ... at least that of Yanagibara Kazuma."

Perhaps he spoke a little too plainly.

Rokurōbei had a last touch of conscience — "Chōbei, what

manner of man is this one you bring? What is his real nature? Tamiya is upright as the walls of the castle. And Yanagibara Kazuma...."

Chōbei's brow wrinkled.

He was spared an answer.

Said the maid — "Yanagibara Sama would see the master."

"Show him in at once," said Rokurōbei.

He rose, as much in amazement as in courtesy.

Kazuma was a striking figure as he entered the room. His dress of white Satsuma was of finest quality, and perfectly aligned. The cloak was of the corrugated Akashi crape. In his girdle he wore the narrow swords then coming into fashion, with finely lacquered scabbards.

In person he was tall, fair, with high forehead and big nose. Slender and sinewy every

movement was lithe as that of a cat.

Kondō gasped as he made the accustomed salutations. "This man for Lady Iwa! Bah! A fox has stolen a jewel!" All his compunction and discretion vanished before this unusual presence.

Kazuma gracefully apologized for his intrusion, thus uninvited.

Kondō stammered protests and his delight at the opportunity of meeting Yanagibara Dono.

Chōbei smiled inward and outward delight at thus summarily removing any too pointed objections of Kondō.

For absolute self-possession in this awkward situation the younger man easily carried the palm. Kazuma acted as would a man double his years.

Chōbei was not only delighted, but astonished. "Whence had the Sensei produced all this wondrous get-up? Was he in real fact a magician?"

Kazuma knew, but he was not one to enlighten Chōbei or anyone else.

After talk on general matters the affair of the meeting was broached.

Said Kondō Rokurōbei — "Thus to trouble Yanagibara Dono

requires apology, but the affair is not without advantage. The lady is the daughter of Tamiya, a dōshin and favoured by the Hosokawa House. This Kondō is honoured in presenting Kazuma Dono in Yotsuya."

"Nay, fear enters. The honour of this meeting with Kondō Dono is as great as the intrusion has been unseemly. Deign to pardon the precipitancy of this Kazuma."

Kondō protested in his turn.

Said Chōbei — "The presentation made, doubtless the matter is as good as concluded. But Tamiya Dono is ill; this visit is unexpected. If Kondō Dono would deign to precede, and ascertain how matters are at Tamiya, it would be well."

To this Kondō assented. Making his excuses he set out for Samonchō, bubbling over with excitement, and praying that the matter would have certain

issue; and thus establish him for life on the shoulders of the wealthy Tamiya. Prayers? Indeed he did stop on the road, one lined with the ecclesiastical structures. Kondō had too much at stake, not to invoke all likely aid.

With his departure Chōbei began to go into the externals of the House of Tamiya.

As they walked along — "Congenial surroundings." This was with a grin and a wave of

the hand toward the long line of temple buildings and graveyards they were passing. "Not much savour of present lodging in Hanagawadō. Eh! Kazuma Uji, even Chōbei notes the difference."

He stopped opposite the Gwanshōji and looked across the way. The fruit was already formed on the trees of Matazaémon's garden. "Persimmons of a hundred momme each; twenty cartloads

for the profit of the house at the fall of the year."

As they passed in the entrance on Samonchō he pointed to a store-house. "Stuffed with rice, from the farms of Tamiya in Kazusa. No husks to be found in it."

"Who said there were?" said Kazuma testily.

His eyes were taking in the wide proportions of the garden, the

spreading roof and eaves of a stately mansion.

As they passed along the rōka to a sitting room Chōbei called his attention to the fret work between the rooms, the panelled ceilings, the polished and rare woodwork of alcoves.

A kakémono of the severe Kano school was hung in the sitting room alcove, a beautifully arranged vase of flowers stood beneath it.

Matazaémon could not use his legs, but his hands were yet active. Of his visitors he knew nothing; least of all of Chōbei.

Kondō Rokurōbei appeared. With him was an old lady.

Lady Naka bowed to the ground before the proposed son-in-law. She was in a flutter over the beautiful man destined for Lady Iwa. The admirable courtesy of his manners, the tender softness of voice, robbed her of what little judgment she had.

Her only fear was that the candidate for honours and the Tamiya would escape.

Said Chōbei — "We come from Asakusa, it is a long distance; the occasion exceptional. Cannot the daughter of the house favour us by pouring the wine?"

The old woman hummed and hawed.

Kondō, too, seemed put out. "As a matter of fact Lady Iwa is not

presentable. She has taken cold, and just now is in bed. Perhaps the grandmother will urge her further, now that Yanagibara Uji is present."

Lady Naka at once rose, like to an automaton, the spring of which has been pressed.

She disappeared, to return and repeat her lesson. "Wilful as a child! One would suppose her such. Illness she would disregard, but her hair is not made up. She cannot think of

appearing before company. Truly she is vexing."

"Not so," defended Chōbei. "She could not show higher regard than by refusing to appear before a future husband in careless attire. It is a guarantee of conduct when married. She is much to be commended for such respect. All women like to appear well. A man in the neighborhood, and rice powder and rouge are at once applied. How neglect such an elaborate

structure as the hair? Trust Chōbei's judgment as to women."

Lady Naka thought that he spoke well, but like most men with great conceit.

Kazuma looked out towards the beautiful garden. He took the chance to smile, for he had soon ascertained that Kondō knew little about his agent, who was in fact a precipitate, testy man.

However, he was a little put out at not seeing the would-be bride.

At an opportunity he stepped out, to see more of the house and its surroundings.

Chōbei came up to him as he stood on the rōka. His voice was coaxing and pleading. "Is it not a fine prospect — for Kazuma Dono?" His voice hung on the 'Dono.' "Nay, don't let escape this splendid piece of luck. Long has Chōbei interested himself in

his neighbor Kazuma Dono. Such a beautiful exterior should have a proper setting. Marry Lady Iwa San and Kazuma Dono is master of Tamiya. Is it agreed?"

Kazuma looked down in thought. At his age there are ideals of the other sex, hard to put aside.

Said he — "Not to see the lady.... Is she so horrible?"

Chōbei protested. "Not so! The lady is a mere item, well fitted to go with this fine house, this beautiful garden, these store-houses filled with goods. Look: Tamiya Dono is a man of double rations. The property has nagaya for attendants. For long this has not been used. Tamiya will not rent it out. It will be so much revenue added to the stipend of the House, and will replace the old man's uncertain income from his

accomplishments as master of hanaiké and cha-no-yu."

Kazuma looked around, following the pointing finger of Chōbei.

He was in sad straits. His only hope for the future was this position of an heir. No matter what the woman might be, there was compensation.

To Chōbei's direct question he made answer — "Yes."

The affair of the marriage suffered no delays. Chōbei had struck home.

Kazuma was so impressed with the surroundings, especially after a return to his own miserable quarters, that the matter of the interview took a minor place to the inspection of his future property.

Within the week he had removed to the house of Kondō Rokurōbei. The latter introduced him to his future

associates in the neighborhood by a succession of fish and wine dinners dear to the heart of the men of Nippon.

These neighbors were astonished at the future son-in-law of the Tamiya. This man was to be the husband of the incubus? Was he mad, or drunk?

Perhaps the latter, for neither themselves nor Kazuma had the opportunity to be particularly sober during this period of festivity.

Of course there was an introduction to Matazaémon, the other principal involved.

As Kondō carefully explained, no set date could be made for this interview. Tamiya Dono was ill, and to be seen at a favourable time.

As ill luck would have it, on the very day the interview was permitted Lady Iwa San received an urgent summons from the Okugata of the Hosokawa House.

This could not be disregarded, and her absence on the second occasion was easily explained and condoned.

Kondō certainly made no effort, and Kazuma no suggestion, for a meeting in the three days intervening before the formal marriage.

At evening the guests met in the reception rooms of Tamiya. In a private apartment were Kondō Rokurōbei and his wife, with Lady Iwa, and “Iémon”.

The latter name had been assumed by Kazuma on his formal registration in the Tamiya House.

It was Chōbei who had purchased the wadded hood of floss silk worn by the bride on this great occasion of her life.

The newly-named Iémon could see but little within its depths, except the shining light of her countenance. Joy perhaps?

At least this curiosity was soon to be satisfied.

Nine times — three times three — were the saké cups drained.

Kondō Rokurōbei joined the hands of the train, exhorting them to mutual forbearance, Lady Iwa to unquestioning obedience to the husband. He pattered over the maxims of the Dōjikun of Kaibara Yekken in this strange case, as he had done twenty times before with favourable results. Yekken's

book was comparatively recent, only a few decades old, and the woman's guide.

Truly the position of the marriage broker was no easy one, if it was to bring him at odds with either House involved. He felt complacent. This pair at least presented less complications in that line than usual.

What there was of doubtful issue came now to the test. At this crisis he cast an eye to the

verandah to see that Chōbei really was at hand as promised. Then the strings of the bridal hood were loosed. The silk concealing the face of Lady Iwa was removed.

Iémon rose to his feet as if impelled by springs; then hurriedly he sat again with some mumbled excuse and trembling hands.

He could not take his eyes from the shining white of the face before him, the glazed smooth

surface left in many places between the black of the pock marks.

The removal of the hood had somewhat disarrayed the hair, leaving the broad expanse of forehead more prominent, the puffed heavy eyelids in the face more conspicuous. In the depths shone two tiny points, the eyes.

Indeed, as Chōbei afterwards described it, the eyelids and eyes had the appearance of kuzumanju, the dumplings of

white rice paste with the black dots of dark brown tofu sunk deep in the centre.

Never had Lady Iwa appeared to such disadvantage.

She was now engaged in removing the white garment, to appear in her proper array as bride and wife.

Iémon took advantage of this absence to step to the rōka. In leaving the room Kondō had given a wink to Chōbei.

Iémon almost ran into him. He seized him by the arm. The young man's voice was excited. He spoke in a whisper, as one who could barely find speech. With satisfaction Chōbei noted that he was frightened, not angered.

"What is that? Who is that creature?" were the first words of Iémon.

Replied Chōbei coldly — "That is the wife of Tamiya Iémon; Lady Iwa San, daughter of

Matazaémon Dono; your wife to eight thousand generations." Then roughly — "Deign, Iémon San, not to be a fool. In the purchase of cow or horse, what does the buyer know of the animal? Its real qualities remain to be ascertained. Lady Iwa San is ugly. That much Chōbei will admit. She is pock-marked, perhaps stoops a little. But if the daughter of the rich Tamiya, a man with this splendid property, had been a great beauty, this Iémon would not

have become the heir of Tamiya, the future master of its wealth. What qualification had he for such a position — a diviner, a man whose pedigree perhaps would not stand too much search."

He looked keenly at Iémon, and noted with satisfaction how the last thrust had gone home.

Chōbei must know more of Iémon, ex-Kazuma. He determined on that for the future.

He continued — "Withdrawal at this juncture would merely create scandal. Matazaémon is not so bereft of friends that such a step would not cause serious displeasure in high quarters. The insult would find an avenger. Then consider please: the old man is kept alive by the anxiety to see his granddaughter established in life, the line of the Tamiya assured. He will die within the month. If the old woman hangs on too long" — he halted speech

for a moment, then coldly — "Give her lizard to eat. A diviner, doubtless Iémon San knows Kondō Rokurōbei by this time. He will never prejudice the man who holds in his hands the purse of the Tamiya. Iémon San and Lady Iwa San are left alone. Good luck to you, honoured Sir, in the encounter. In this Chōbei a counsellor and friend always is to be found; and one by no means lacking experience of the world. As for the woman, she is your wife;

one to take charge of the house and affairs of Iémon Dono is to hand. No other housemaker could be found so earnest in duty and so cheap, as Lady Iwa San. Take a concubine. This Chōbei will purchase one for you; such a one as will be the object of envy and desire to the whole of young Edo. His opportunities in that line are exceptional. Come! To turn on the lights. On our part at least there is nothing to conceal."

Iémon did not pay attention to the hint.

The one thought harassing him must out — "Lop-sided and — a leper!" He spoke with despair and conviction, eyes fastened on Chōbei, and such a frightened look that even Chōbei had pity.

One foot in the room he turned back. "That is not so — absolutely."

Iémon could not disbelieve the earnest testimony.

Said Chōbei — "The wounds of smallpox were no trivial ones. In healing the scars were such in places as form over burns. Hence the shining surface. Positively there is no leprous taint in Tamiya." He was gratified by the sigh which came from Iémon, sign of the immense weight lifted off the young man's mind. "Bah! leave things to the future, and — enjoy the present. Lady Iwa cannot grow ugly with age. So much is gained. What difference

will her looks make to Iémon thirty years hence? She is a woman. Make a child on her. Then you are free to turn elsewhere."

At once he began to place lights everywhere, as a sign to Kondō that all was well.

This worthy came forward with other guests, to congratulate the Tamiya House on being once more in young and vigorous hands.

It was Iémon himself who gave the signal to retire.

How matters went alone with his bride has reference to one of those occasions over which the world draws the veil of decency.

In the morning Lady Iwa arose early to attend to the matutinal needs of her spouse.

The ablutions performed, Iémon sat down to tea, as exquisite and exquisitely served as in any dream in literature of how such

ceremony of the opening day should be performed.

Then the morning meal was brought, under the same supervision of this woman, as expert in all the technique of her craft as she was ugly in feature; and that was saying much.

Iémon watched her movements in the room with curiosity, mixed with a little pain and admiration.

He was quick to note the skill with which she concealed the slight limp, due to the shrinking of the sinews of one leg and causing an unevenness of gait. It was a blemish in the little quick movements of a woman of surpassing grace; who by art had conquered disease and an ungainly figure.

Lady Iwa had left the room for a moment to get flowers to place in the vases, offering to the

Spirits of the departed in the Butsudan.

On her return Iémon held the memorial tablets in his hands. A priest, these had at once attracted his notice.

"Kangetsu Shinshi; Kangetsu Shimmyō; Lady Iwa San, these people have died on the same day of the month — and the year?"

"Is on the back of the ihai," replied Lady Iwa. "No; it is not a case of suicide together."

Then seeing his evident curiosity she motioned him to sit as she poured tea, ready for a long story.

With its progress voice and manner grew more strained and earnest. She never took her eyes from the mats.

"The tablets are those of the father and mother of this Iwa.

My mother's name was Mino. Daughter of Tamiya she acted badly with my father Densuké, a mere servant in the house.

“This Densuké was a good man, but his status of servant made my grandfather very angry. He drove the twain from the house. Thus deprived of means to live, my father took a position as cook in the yashiki of a great noble. Here he was frightened into becoming the tool of a very wicked man.

“Having killed a usurer this man forced my father to dispose of the body under penalty of death if he refused. The body being placed in a cloth, my father had carried it to his house.

“During his short absence my mother's curiosity led her into untying the bundle. Her screams aroused the neighborhood.

“As they entered she was seized with convulsions, and gave birth to this Iwa, thus brought into

the world together with the exposure of the crime.

“My father, doubtless warned by the crowd, fled from Edo. My mother had but time to tell her story to the kenshi. Then she died.

“A year later to the day my father's dead body was found floating in the castle moat, near the town of Yūki in Shimosa. A beggar man, but little inquiry was made into the crime.

“For long the cause and the criminal were unknown. Then a bantō was robbed in the Shiba Kiridōshi; his companion was killed. The criminals were traced, and on confession were put to death. The leader and most wicked of them also confessed to the murder of the usurer Jusuké and to that of my father Densuké.

“My father had met him again in Yūki town, and had aroused in

him fear of denunciation of past crimes.

“He spoke of Densuké as a superstitious, haunted fool; thus in his wickedness regarding my father's remorse and desire to clear up the strange affair.

“The execution of this man removed all chance of my avenging the deaths of father and mother on himself.

“But he has left behind a son.

“The one wish of this Iwa is to meet with Kichitarō; to avenge on him the wickedness of his father Takahashi Daihachirō."

Iémon at first had followed in idle mood her story. With the development of the details he showed an attention which grew in intensity at every stage.

With the mention of the name of Takahashi Daihachirō he gave a violent start.

“Yanagibara Kazuma”, “Iémon Tamiya” — what were these but names to hide this Kichitarō, the one-time priest Myōshin of the Jōshinji at Reigan Fukagawa, and son of Daihachirō?

Strange was this retributory fate which had brought these two into the most intimate relations of husband and wife.

When Iémon could control his voice he said — "That Lady Iwa San should have this feeling in reference to the wicked

Daihachirō can be understood. But why such hatred toward this Kichitarō? Surely the boy is not to be held guilty of the father's offence!"

"That is a man's way of reasoning," answered Lady Iwa. "A woman, ignorant and foolish, has but her feelings to consult. To seven births this Iwa will clutch and chew the wicked son of a wicked father. Against Kichitarō is the vow made." She raised her head.

Iémon turned away shuddering. Lady Iwa had aged into a hag. The shining face, the marks like black spots in pumice standing out, the mere dots of eyes in their puffy bed, the spreading mouth with its large shining teeth — all turned the ugly gentle girl into a very demon.

The certainty, the intensity, of a malignant hate was driven into Iémon.

He was so frightened that he even nodded assent to her last words.

The gentle voice of Lady Iwa added — "Iwa is ugly; perhaps annoys by the tale. Leave the affair to her and to the enemy. To Iémon she is bound for two existences. Deign to drop all formality; call her Iwa, and condescend to regard her with affection."

And Iémon covenanted with himself so to do. The present should compensate for the past.

But in the days which followed Lady Iwa’s presence sat on him as a nightmare. He felt the impress of her teeth at his throat, and would wake up gasping.

Time made the situation familiar. He carefully lulled her into a blind admiration and belief in her husband Iémon.

There seemed no likelihood of Lady Iwa learning the truth; or believing it, if she did.

CHAPTER 8: IF OLD ACQUAINTANCE BE FORGOT

Matazaémon's illness justified all the predictions of Chōbei.

In the course of the month it was plain that his last hold on life was rapidly weakening. In that time Iémon had won golden opinions from household and neighbors.

His face was beautiful, and this they saw. His heart was rotten

to the core, and this he kept carefully concealed.

The incentive of his fear of Lady Iwa kept up the outward signs of good-will. He found this easier with the passage of the days. Ugly as she was in face and figure, no one could help being attracted by the goodness of Lady Iwa's disposition.

Iémon, in his peculiar situation, placed great hopes on this, even if discovery did take place.

Day following day he began to discount this latter contingency. To a feeling of half liking, half repugnance, was added a tinge of contempt for one so wrapped in her immediate surroundings, whose attention was so wholly taken up with the matter in hand. She easily could be kept in ignorance, easily be beguiled.

One day Iémon was summoned to the old man's bedside. He was shocked at the change

which had taken place in a few hours.

Propped upon pillows Matazaémon would speak a few last words. With a shade of his old impertinent official smile and manner — "The Tamiya is to be congratulated on its great good fortune in the entrance of one so well qualified by appearance and manners to uphold its reputation. Deign, honoured heir, to accept the thanks of this Matazaémon. All

else has been placed in the hands of Iémon — goods, reputation, granddaughter."

Iémon bowed flat in acknowledgment and protest at the good-will expressed.

Continued Matazaémon — "There is one matter close to the old man's heart. Concerning that he would make his last request to the admirable heart of Iémon. Iwa is an ugly girl. The end of time for man, and the carping comment of

neighbors come to his ears, have opened the eyes of Matazaémon to the truth. Great has been the favour in disregarding this ugliness and taking her to wife. Everything is in the hands of Iémon San. Consider her happiness and deign to use her well. Abstain if possible from taking a concubine. At all events conceal the fact from Iwa, if it be deigned to keep such company. Ugliness and jealousy go together. Faithful and upright,

such a disposition as hers is not to be strained on that point. She would be very unhappy. Better the temporary women of Shinjuku Nakachō, than one who usurps the place of the wife. Condescend to remember this last request of Tamiya Matazaémon." He clasped the hand of Iémon, and tears were in his eyes as he spoke.

Iémon, too, was affected. It almost frightened him to be left alone with Lady Iwa. "Deign not

to consider such unlikely contingency. The amiability of Lady Iwa is compensation for the greatest beauty. Who could think of injuring her in any way? Perhaps a child soon will be the issue. With this in mind condescend to put aside all gloomy thoughts. Concentrate the honoured will on life, and complete recovery to health will follow. Such, indeed, is the daily prayer of this Iémon at the Myōgyōji."

Matazaémon smiled faintly — with gratification or grimness? Perhaps death unseals the vision.

Often indeed did Iémon present himself at the family temple; he the substitute for the Master of Tamiya.

But as often did his feet return by the diametrically opposite direction, running the gauntlet of charms of the beauties of Nakachō.

Iémon held on to the hand of Matazaémon, swearing and forswearing himself with the greatest earnestness and the best of intentions. Suddenly he raised his head.

The emotion aroused by the interview had been too much for the old man's fluttering heart. His head had slipped down sideways on the pillow. A little stream of dark bitter refuse flowed from the mouth and choked him.

He was dead.

Great was the grief of wife and grandchild; great was the importance of Iémon, now in very fact Master of Tamiya.

Whether or not he followed the advice of Chōbei, and gave the old woman poison; whether her constant small journeys to the houses of neighbors, reciting a litany of praise of this wondrous son-in-law; whether the loss of the companion of so many years wore out the feeble frame; it is

fact that Lady Naka followed her lord before the maple leaf turned red. Again the Tamiya was the scene of the funereal chanting of the priest.

The corpse removed with the provision for the guests and watchers at the wake, the seventh night of the death observed, with this removal of the deceased spirit from the scenes of its former activities Iémon could turn himself

without impediment to the life of the future.

Outward change there was none. He was the same kind and affectionate husband as of former days. Neighbors, anticipating some change of manner, were still louder in their praises.

One day there appeared at Tamiya two intimates, Natsumé Kyuzō and Imaizumi Jinzaémon.

"Iémon Uji, a matter of importance presses. We are on our way to the neighborhood head, Itō Kwaiba Dono. Deign to go in company. You are known to be an expert at Go, a game at which the old man prides himself for skill. He chafes at the presence of this unknown rival, heard of but not yet tested. A dinner and wine are at stake. Without Iémon Uji we do not dare to present ourselves. Condescend to go in company. To know the great man of the

neighborhood, the wealthy Itō Kwaiba, is of advantage even to Tamiya."

Iémon laughed and assented. He was soon dressed for the greater ceremony of a first visit.

All three climbed down into their clogs, and set out for the house of the Kumigashira near Samégabashi.

If Iémon had been impressed by the wealth of Tamiya, he felt

insignificant before that of the head of Yotsuya.

Itō Kwaiba was a man of sixty-four years, retaining much of the vigour of his youth. For the past ten years he had added Go to his twin passions for wine and women, neither of which seemed to have made any impression on a keenness of sight which could read the finest print by the scanty light of a lamp, teeth which could chew the hard and tough dried

mochi as if bean confection, and an activity of movement never to be suspected from his somewhat heavy frame.

At the name of Tamiya he looked up with much curiosity, and Iémon thought his greeting rather brusque.

Iémon saluted with great respect — "Truly fear is inspired. For long no visit has been paid to the honoured head. Coming thus without invitation

is very rude. Intrusion is feared."

"Nay! Nay!" replied Kwaiba, apparently attracted by the splendid externals of Iémon. "The failure to visit is reciprocal. In fact, Tamiya and this Kwaiba have been at odds these many years. Visits had altogether ceased. This, however, is no matter for the younger generation. But Iémon San is indeed a fine fellow. So Kwaiba had heard from all he

met. Ah! A fellow to put all the girls in a flutter. He is the very image of this Kwaiba in younger years. The husbands were little troubled when he was around. The fair ones were attracted. Well, well: they all had their turn at Kwaiba; and Kwaiba has stood the pace. He is as good to-day as ever; in some ways.... And it is a man like Iémon San who has married the — the lady of Tamiya."

Iémon knew the term "incubus" had nearly slipped out.

Knowing Lady Iwa's attractiveness of temperament, feeling touched in his own conceit, this astonished and satirical reception he met with on every side nettled him more than a little.

Perhaps Kwaiba noted it. With greatest unction he urged a cushion and at once changed the subject. "Iémon San is noted as a Go player. This Kwaiba is a

mere amateur. It is for him to ask odds in making request for a game.... Ho! Heigh! The Go board and stones!"

Kwaiba and Iémon were the antagonists. Natsumé and Imaizumi sat at the sides of the board.

Kwaiba, confident in his powers, readily accepted the deprecatory answer of Iémon at its face value. The game was to be on even terms.

Iémon really was an expert of the sixth grade out of nine total; certainly of several grades superiority to Kwaiba.

The latter's brows knit as his position rapidly became imperilled.

Natsumé was in a ferment. Fish or wine? If Iémon sought Kwaiba's favour by a preliminary sound thrashing at his favourite game, the prospects of either were small.

He dropped his tobacco pipe. In picking it up he gave the buttocks of Iémon a direct and severe pinch.

Iémon was too astonished to cry out. His ready mind sought a motive for this unexpected assault and pain. The face of Natsumé was unmoved, that of Imaizumi anxious.

A glance at Kwaiba's attitude enlightened him. Politeness and a dinner were at stake.

Even Natsumé and Imaizumi wondered and admired at what followed. The blunder of Iémon was a stroke of genius, the inspiration of an expert player.

It was a slight blunder, not obvious to the crudeness of Kwaiba; but it opened up the whole of Iémon's position and put the game in his antagonist's hands. Kwaiba promptly seized the advantage.

His triumphant glance shifted continually from Iémon to the

onlookers, as the former struggled bravely with a desperate position.

Kwaiba won this first game somewhat easily. A second he lost by a bare margin. In the third he scored success in a manner to make evident his superiority over a really expert player.

Confident in his championship of the neighborhood, he was all geniality as at the end he sorted

and swept back the Go stones into their polished boxes.

"Go-ishi of Shingu; soft as a woman's hands. But never mind the sex. Now for fish and wine.... However, Hana can serve the liquor for us." To the servant — "Heigh! Some refreshments for the honoured guests; and convey the request of Kwaiba to Lady Hana San, to be present."

With the wine appeared Lady Hana San.

She was a beautiful girl. Of not more than twenty years, on the graceful sloping shoulders was daintily set a head which attracted attention and admiration.

The face was a pure oval with high brow, and was framed in long hair gathered below the waist and reaching nearly to her ankles with its heavy luxuriant mass.

She was dressed for the hot season of the year in a light

coloured Akashi crape, set off by a broad sash of peach colour in which were woven indistinct and delicate wavy designs. The sleeves, drawn a little back, showed the arms well up to the shoulder. Glimpses of a beautifully moulded neck and bosom appeared from time to time as she moved here and there in her preparation of the service of the wine utensils.

The delicate tissue of the dress seemed to caress the somewhat

narrow hips of a girlish figure. Every movement was studied and graceful.

This Lady Hana had belonged to the Fukadaya at Yagura no Shita of Fukagawa.

She had been what is known as a harlot, wearing the obi in the usual form, without the loose overrobe or shikaké of the common women. In the period of 1830 to1843 all Fukagawa harlots were dressed in this manner.

Attracted by her beauty old Kwaiba had paid off her contract and made her his concubine. For nearly two years she had held this position in his house.

In serving the wine she came to the front and knelt before Iémon as first to receive it. In handing him the tray with the cup she looked into his face.

The start on the part of both was obvious. Some of the wine was spilled.

Said Kwaiba — "Then Iémon Uji, you know this woman?" His tone was hard and truculent. It conveyed the suspicion of the jealous old male.

Iémon's former profession stood him in good stead. He had a glib tongue, and no intention to deny what had been made perfectly obvious — "It is fact, and nothing to be ashamed of on the part of Iémon; except as to attendant conditions beyond

control. I was a diviner on the public highway."

"So 'twas heard," grumbled Kwaiba. "Without customers, and with no use for the diviner's lens but to charr the rafters of the garret in which you lived."

Iémon did not care to notice the attack. He merely said — "Deign not to find amusement in what really is a serious matter to one who has to suffer poverty. While seated at the diviner's stand attention was drawn by a girl

coming down the Kuramaé. Slouching along close by her was a drunken samurai. From time to time he lurched entirely too close to her. Turning unexpectedly her parasol caught in his cloak, which thereby was slightly torn.

“At once he flew into a great rage. Laying hands on her he showed no disposition to accept her excuses. 'Careless wench! You have torn my dress. How very impudent of you. Unless

you at once accompany me to the tea house close by, to serve the wine and please me, of forgiveness there is none; be sure of that.' The people had gathered like a black mountain. Nothing was to be seen but heads.

“Lady Hana San was in the greatest embarrassment, unable to free herself from the insults and importunities of the drunken fellow.

“This Iémon was a samurai hid under the diviner's garb. Stepping from the stand I interposed in the girl's behalf, making apology, and pointing out the rudeness of his behaviour to the drunkard. Instead of becoming calm he raised his fist and struck me in the face.

“His condition gave the advantage without use of arms. Locking a leg in his tottering supports I threw him down into

the ditch. Then with a word to Lady Hana San to flee at once, we disappeared in different directions.

“The samurai Iémon again became disguised as the diviner. That part of his rôle this Iémon regrets; but a weapon he could not draw in the quarrel. Later on meeting Lady Hana San at the Kwannon temple of Asakusa thanks were received, for what was a very trivial service."

"And again renewed," said the beauty, raising her downcast face to look direct into that of Iémon.

Said Kwaiba — "Ah! That's the tale, is it? A fortunate encounter, and a strange reunion; but the world is full of such. Lady Hana, it comes in most befitting that opportunity is afforded to favour the rescuer with something of greater value than thanks. Pray serve him with wine."

Then did Kwaiba take the matter as a man of the world. But he was no fool, this old tanuki of a thousand years experience on hill and in dale. He understood very well that between Iémon and Lady Hana there had been a closer connection than that of mere accident.

CHAPTER 9: LOVE KNOTS

Many were the visits paid by Iémon to contest at Go with Itō Kwaiba.

Rapid was the progress of the love affair between a young man and a young woman, both inspired with a consuming passion for each other.

In former days — something more than two years before — when Iémon was priest in the Jōshinji of the Reigan district of Fukagawa, and was spending the money of the oshō so freely, he had met Lady Hana at the Fukagawa of Yagura no Shita.

Just entering on her career, she at once captivated him with a permanent passion.

It was in her company that the funds of the temple had been cast to the four winds of heaven. His love had been fully reciprocated by Lady Hana.

The one purpose was to pay off the debt of the lady, and then to live together as husband and wife. Such was the engagement plighted between them.

However, the ransom figure was large. Iémon — or Kazuma at that time, for he dropped his priestly name when out of bounds — had already planned a larger raid than usual on the ecclesiastical treasury.

Warned by Lady Hana that his operations had been discovered, he had sought safety in flight; not without a last tearful parting with his mistress, and assurance that fate somehow

would bring them again together.

The engagement thus entered on was to flourish under the new conditions.

As to this pursuit of Lady Hana, in which the maiden was coy and willing, the lover circumspect and eager, or at least thought he was, those around the pair were soon well informed; that is, with the exception of the most interested — Lady Iwa and Kwaiba.

The marked neglect which now ensued Lady Iwa took in wifely fashion; and attributing it to some passing attraction to the sex workers of Shinjuku Nakachō, she did not take it to heart as she would have done if a concubine had been at issue.

As for Kwaiba, the usually astute and prying old man was so immersed in his Go as to be struck blind, deaf, and dumb.

The matter coming to the ears of Kondō Rokurōbei, the worthy

gentleman was seriously alarmed. If true, the old man had indeed reached a parting of the ways, at which he had to satisfy Iémon, Master of Tamiya, Lady Iwa, his neighborhood, and Itō Kwaiba, the powerful influence in the daily life of all of them.

That night there was a meeting at the house of Kwaiba, a competition in gidayu recitation, dancing, and poetry making.

He presented himself in season at the door of the Tamiya. "Ah! Lady Iwa San; and to-night does Iémon join the company at the house of the Kumigashira? Rokurōbei comes from Kawagoé, and perhaps is not too late to find company on the road."

"Oh! Is it Kondō Sama? Iya! the Danna has but begun his preparations.... Iémon! The Danna of Yotsuyazaka has come; for company on the way to Itō

Sama's house.... Deign to enter. In a short time Iémon will be ready."

Kondō looked at her quizzically. There was no sign of distress or misgivings in this quarter. He felt encouraged.

Probably the rumour was false or exaggerated; perhaps it was wholly due to the malice of Akiyama Chōzaémon, from whom that day he had heard it.

He turned to greet Iémon, who emerged ready for the street. At the entrance they halted.

Said Iémon — "It will be a long drawn-out affair. Deign to retire, and not await the return."

Replied Lady Iwa — "A small matter. The sound of the Danna's footstep will arouse Iwa to receive him."

Iémon laughed. "How so? How distinguish my steps from those

of Akiyama San or other constant callers?"

Said Lady Iwa gravely — "When the wife can no longer distinguish the husband's footstep, then affection has departed. Lady Iwa will be ready to receive Iémon, no matter what the hour."

"And, indeed, a late one," put in Kondō. "The party consists mainly of young men. After it they will adjourn to Nakachō. Is

it allowed to Iémon Dono to accompany them?"

Lady Iwa winced a little. "The Master is always master, within and without the house. He will do as he pleases."

"Gently said; like a true wife. Truly such a married pair are rarely to be encountered. They are the mandarin duck and drake of Morokoshi transplanted to Yotsuya. Rokurōbei feels proud of his guardianship."

As he and Iémon took their way along the Teramachi, he said — "Iémon is indeed a wonderful man. He is handsome and pursued by the women. Lady Iwa undeniably is ugly; yet never is there failure to show her respect and consideration, in private as well as public. One's life here in Yotsuya is open to all the neighbors, and these speak well of Iémon."

Said the younger man, in matter of fact tone — "Who could fail

toward Iwa? She is amiability itself. Ugly, perhaps, but gentleness is the compensating quality, a truer source of household wealth than beauty."

"Well spoken! Deign to keep it in heart, for the neighbors' tongues wag as to Iémon and Lady Hana. Malice can cause as much unhappiness as downright wickedness. Besides, Kwaiba is no man to trifle with."

Iémon was a little put out and alarmed at the directness of

Kondō's reference. "Be sure there is nothing in such talk. A slight service, rendered in earlier days, makes Lady Hana San more cordial to one otherwise a stranger. The excess shown is perhaps to be discouraged. But Itō Dono is good company and has good wine; and besides really is a good Go player. It would be loss to shun his house."

Kondō noted a first symptom on their arrival.

He spoke sharply to the maid — "Middle age in company with youth plainly finds a poor reception. Is that the master's order? The clogs of Tamiya are not the only ones. Is Rokurōbei to shift for himself?"

The girl, all confusion, made profuse apology as she hastened to repair the neglect.

Kondō was easily mollified. "Bah! No wonder. Bring Tamiya Iémon near a woman, and all is confusion.... But Itō Dono?"

"This way, honoured Sirs: the Danna awaits the guests."

They entered the sitting room, to find Kwaiba in a high state of anger and sulks.

For some reason, error in transmission or date or other ambiguity, not a man of the guests had appeared. "The supper prepared is next to useless. We four can do but little in its dispatch. Not so with the wine; let every man do double duty here."

He hustled around and gave his orders with some excitement; more than cordial with the guests who had not failed him.

There was present one Kibei. Iémon had noted with curiosity his first appearance on this ground.

What effect was this factor going to have on Lady Hana's position in the household? He had been reassured on the physical point. Kibei was exceedingly ugly, a regular

demon mask, and Lady Hana was a woman to make much of physical beauty, as well as strength and ruggedness.

He was a younger son of Inagaki Shōgen, a hatamoto with a yashiki in Honjō and an income of three thousand koku.

It was almost certain that Kwaiba would adopt Kibei. The negotiations had been long continued, and there was some hitch in the matter that Iémon could not make out.

What he did realize was Kibei's hostility to himself.

A noted swordsman, making some sort of a living as teacher of the art, he was the last man with whom Iémon had any desire for a quarrel. Iémon was a coward, and the cold eye of Kibei sent a chill down his spine. Himself, he was always excessively polite in their intercourse.

Limited as to number the party tried to make up for the missing guests by liveliness.

There was a dance by Kibei, drinking as substitutes of the absent, and competition in poetry. Handing in his own effort — no mean one — Iémon left the room for a moment.

As he came out on the corridor, and was about to return to the guest room, he found the maid Lady Moto awaiting him with water and towel. A slight

puckering frown came over Iémon's face at this imprudence.

Said the girl pleadingly — "Danna Sama, deign to exercise patience. That of Lady Hana is sorely tried. The absence of the other guests, the pursuit of Kibei Dono, who only seeks to compromise her and secure her expulsion from the house, or even death at the hand of Kwaiba Dono, has driven her well nigh mad. A moment — in this room."

Iémon drew back. — "A room apart, and in darkness! The age of seven years once passed, and boy and girl are never to be allowed alone together."

He would have refused, but a sudden push and he was within.

The shōji closed at once.

Kwaiba's voice called loudly — "Hana! Hana! What has become of the girl? There is no one to serve the wine. If the ugliness of Kibei drives her to cover,

Tamiya's beauty should lure her out. Hana! Hana!"

Lady Hana slipped hastily from the arms of Iémon.

Passing through the garden she entered the kitchen and snatched up a saké bottle from the stove. She did not notice that the fire had gone entirely out.

She and Iémon entered the sitting room together, from different sides.

Rokurōbei looked sharply at Iémon.

Kibei was engaged in hot talk with Kwaiba.

Said Kondō — "Where have you been? Pressed by necessity? For such a lapse of time! nonsense! Is rice powder found in such a place? 'Plaster'? It does not leave the mark of a cheek on the sleeve."

He laid a warning hand on Iémon, skilfully removing the

telltale mark in so doing. "What has happened is clear enough. Fortunately Kwaiba and Kibei have got into a dispute over the merits of Heinai and Shōsetsu as fencing masters; both of them dead as the long ago quarrels of the Toyotomi and Tokugawa Houses. Heinai was loyal, and Shōsetsu a traitor; but Kibei tries the old man and officer by supporting the prowess of the latter. Besides the saké is cold and Kwaiba at start was in a very bad temper.

He has thought for naught but his drink and disappointment. Cajole him by agreeing with him, but don't get into a quarrel with Kibei. He is expert with the sword, has a temper as ugly as his face, and would willingly engage in one. He doesn’t like you—"

He stopped.

Kwaiba was speaking sharply. He had just taken the fresh bottle. "Cold as a stone! How careless you are."

"Not so," said Lady Hana in some surprise. "It has just come off the stove."

Kwaiba put the bottle in her hand, to her confusion. "Lady Hana must have been asleep; or much engaged, not to note the difference."

For the first time he looked sharply at her, then at Iémon.

Lady Hana often executed great freedom with him — "Asleep! Just so; and no wonder. Without

guests the evening has been boring enough. If Tamiya Sama had brought his wife with him it would have been complete."

Kwaiba, Kibei, Kondō smiled at the sally.

Iémon took the cue, and chose to resent the words. He said coldly — "Lady Iwa certainly brings spice into everything she engages in. Her intelligence is unusual."

Lady Hana looked at him; then smiled a little, reassured. Passing behind him she stumbled. "Forgotten" came the whisper.

Iémon felt a letter thrust into his hand, which he passed quickly to his sleeve.

Then he and Kondō rose to take their leave. The usual salutations followed.

As if to compensate for the failure of the entertainment all joined in seeing them depart.

Kwaiba was still grumbling and half quarrelling with Lady Hana. Lady Moto was engaged with Kondō Rokurōbei.

Kibei insisted on aiding Iémon; and Iémon did not dare to refuse his services in donning the cloak. As he adjusted the awkward efforts of Kibei on one side, this amateur valet made a mess of it on the other. Besides,

neither of them was any too steady on his feet.

Then Kondō and Iémon set out in the rain. "Sayonara! Sayonara!"

CHAPTER 10: THE PLOT AGAINST Lady IWA

The following morning Iémon sat brooding, mind and tongue clouded by the drinking bout of the previous night.

Lady Iwa silently busied herself with his renovation. Rokurōbei had delivered him over to her, decidedly the worse for wine and wear.

He was somewhat astonished at the young man's easy

discomfiture. Middle age with the Nipponese usually means the seasoned and steady toper.

Regarding the matter as partly due to her own fault, and reassured by Kondō as to the events of the evening, Lady Iwa heated the saké with all the greater care, serving it herself, chatting on the indifferent gossip of the neighborhood.

She spoke of the talk current as to Itō Kwaiba's adoption of an heir. "This man Kibei, his

disposition appears to be as ugly as his face." With a little smile she added, "for the latter compensation is to be found in the first-named quality; a truth which he seems to disregard. What will become of Lady Hana San?"

For the first time since the night before the thought of the letter flashed into Iémon's mind. He put down the renovating morning draft, and on some excuse arose.

His kimono lay neatly folded in the flat tray. Hastily he searched the sleeves. There was not a sign of the missive. With clouded brow he returned to the sitting room.

A glance at Lady Iwa made him feel ashamed. It had never come into her hands. He knew her well enough to be assured that he would have found it, scrupulously laid together with the tobacco pouch, nose wipe, and diverse other minor articles

of daily use carried on the person. The whole affair perhaps was a dream.

The more he considered, the more he became so convinced. His transports with Lady Hana, their surprise, Kondō's rebuke — so far the evening was tolerably clear. It was only as to the final cups, the rising to depart, the standing in the cold night air, that the exact course of events became clouded. ‘Ah! It was all a vision. Lady Hana

never would have been so imprudent.’

There was a trace of doubt in his mind. He would clear it up at the fountain source — at Kwaiba's house and by the lips of Lady Hana.

Kwaiba greeted him with almost boisterous cheerfulness. "Ah! Tamiya comes early; a flattering acknowledgment of last night's reception." To Iémon's deprecatory speech and apology — "Don't talk folly, after the

manner of a country boor. Iémon San is a man of the world; and will give this Kwaiba credit for being the same. What does it amount to? A matter of a little too much wine.... Hana! Hana! The Master of Tamiya is present. Cut some tofu, and bring tea. Heat the wine. Matazaémon was so sober an old dog that it is doubtful whether Lady Iwa knows aught about the best remedy for past drinking." As Kibei entered — "There is the inventory of the

Shimosa farms. Condescend to take a glance at the report of the bailiff. Hana will aid."

Thus dismissed, the two left the room.

Kwaiba turned to Iémon — "A draught: no? Then Kwaiba will drink for both. For him it is a day of rejoicing. The coming of Tamiya is opportune. It was intended to send for him. Deign to aid this Kwaiba with counsel. The adoption of Kibei has finally been settled!"

The old man's exultation influenced even the indifference of Iémon's aching head. With well-simulated interest he said — "Ah! I see! Kibei Dono is indeed to be congratulated. As to our chief, since everything is to his satisfaction, Iémon is but too glad to speak his pleasure, to offer his congratulations."

"Nay! A little more than that, Iémon Uji. This Kwaiba would seek his aid in another matter of importance. Kwaiba is old. A

woman no longer is an object to him. He cannot make a child. If Lady Hana should give birth to a child great would be the discomfiture, knowing the truth. What is to be done in such a case?"

He now was looking with direct inquiry into the face of Iémon.

The latter was much confused. He stammered — "Just so: so indeed. Lady Hana San is truly an embarrassment. Doubtless

she is also an obstacle to Kibei Dono. She...."

Sneered Kwaiba — "Tamiya, though young, is wise. He grasps the situation at once. Deign, Iémon San, to take Lady Hana yourself." Kwaiba raised his voice a little.

Kibei brought Lady Hana with him from the next room. She seemed alarmed and embarrassed.

Said Kwaiba — "What have you there; the inventory? Ah! A letter: and there is no one to read a letter like Iémon San. Deign, Sir, to favour us. Iémon San alone can give the contents the proper inflection." He handed it to Iémon.

A glance showed the latter that it was a letter from Lady Hana, probably that of the previous night. His pocket had been neatly picked by Kibei.

It was plain. He had been trapped. The pretended entertainment had been a plot in which the passion of Lady Hana had been given full chance to range. Even the disinterested witness, the old fool Kondō, had been provided.

He caught a curious, mocking smile on the face of the girl Lady Moto, just then passing along the rōka.

Kwaiba allowed the silence to become oppressive.

He seemed to await an incriminating outburst on the part of Lady Hana, plainly on the verge of tears.

However, the girl caught herself up. Instead she turned a calm, inquiring look toward the three men.

Iémon alone looked down, his gaze on the letter the characters of which danced and waved before his eyes. Sharp as he ordinarily was, before this vigorous and astute old man,

backed by the ruffianly prospective son with impertinent smile, the cowardice of Iémon deprived him of all spirit. His faculties were numbed.

Kwaiba leaned over and removed the letter from his hands. "Since Iémon San will not read the letter, Kwaiba will try to do so; a poor substitute for the accomplished cleric." The old fellow seemed to know

everything, as the tone of contempt indicated.

He ran the scroll out in his hands — "Ah! I see! Ma! Ma! What's this? From some woman: a lascivious jade indeed!... Eh! Kibei Dono, apology is due your ears. This Kwaiba laughed at your suspicions." He threw down the scroll, as in a fury.

Kibei picked it up. He began to read:

"Night is the source of pleasure, but greater that pleasure at sight of Iémon. The day comes when Iémon and Hana will be husband and wife, in fact if not in form. ‘Ah! Day and night to be at the service of Iémon.' Thus does Hana pray gods and Buddhas. When distant from his side, even though the time be short, painful is its passage. Place this letter next to your very person. May that night come quickly, when the coming of Iémon is awaited. The

connection with Lady Iwa San is the punishment for sin committed in a previous existence. Condescend to dismiss her from your mind. View the matter wholly in this light. The spiteful brush refuses further service. Hard, hard, is the lot of this Hana. The honoured Master comes; the heartfelt wish is accomplished.

With compliments,

To Iémon Sama."

Hana.

Kwaiba's rage grew and grew with the reading. At Iémon's name he sprang up and made a movement toward the stand on which reposed his swords.

Laying a hand on the larger weapon he turned with a scowl — "Ah! This Kwaiba is old, but in vigour he is young. It is for Kwaiba to sport with the women. They are not to make a fool of him."

Kibei sharply interposed. "Does Kwaiba Dono gain satisfaction by such a vengeance? To Kibei it seems a poor one. A matter so easily to be settled is not to be made a scandal in the neighborhood. Deign, honoured Sir, so to regard it. To punish both at once with death is proper. But is it expedient? Condescend to hear the words of Kibei."

Kwaiba pulled himself up. It was as if some one had dragged him

back. His rage departed. A cold malice took its place.

He smiled blandly — "One does not quarrel over a harlot. Kwaiba spares their lives. Iémon shall take Hana home — as wife."

"As wife!" Iémon broke through his fear. "Surely the honoured Kashira is unreasonable. This Iémon is but the heir of Tamiya. To demand that Lady Iwa San be discarded is going too far. Positively in this matter, though

there have been love passages, the most intimate relation has never followed — now or in previous relations."

"You lie!" said Kwaiba coldly. "Furthermore 'tis a matter not passing the period of last night. But that is not to the point. Against Matazaémon this Kwaiba has a grudge — as yet unsatisfied. Through Lady Iwa San this grudge shall be paid. With Iémon no harsh measures are adopted. Nay; Kwaiba

comes to his aid. You, too, Kibei, shall assist.... Ah! For the ready consent, thanks. Ma! A delicious revenge is that gathered by Kwaiba!

“Lady Hana the harlot takes the place of the daughter of the house. And she loves Iémon! In our feasts Natsumé and Imaizumi get the skin of the omelet; Iémon the centre. Then Lady Iwa is to be driven out. To that Tamiya cannot object. He substitutes honey for garlic;

Lady Hana the flower for the ugly toad Lady Iwa.

“Splendid! Splendid! But how? Ah! Here's Kondō, just in the nick of time. Rokurōbei, aid us with your experience and influence. Aid us with Iémon, who would cleave to the incubus."

Put in possession of the facts Kondō was aghast. He had come to the parting of the ways; and under conditions which assured his participation in the plot.

At first he turned on Iémon with bitter recrimination. "Oh! A virtuous fellow, who would drink a man's wine, lie with his woman, and then preach morality to a household! But the mischief is done. If not the paramour of Lady Hana San, everybody believes it to be so...."

Kwaiba held up his hands in well-simulated anger. Kibei and Rokurōbei interfered.

Iémon's last resistance was broken down. To talk? That is the business of a priest. Soon he was as eagerly engaged in the plot as if he had left the house in Samonchō for that purpose.

Said Rokurōbei — "What difficulty does the matter present? Set on Watanabé Gorō to tempt and make love to Lady Iwa. He is badly in debt. A handsome man of the neighborhood everyone would suspect her fall. Surprised by

Iémon, Lady Iwa is driven out as unchaste. This Kondō stipulates that matters go no further. After all Lady Iwa is innocent of offence. The husband's full rights are not to be excused. Neither she, nor Watanabé is to suffer injury."

Kibei laughed outright at the idea of a drawn sword in Iémon's hand.

Iémon turned the contempt on to Kondō. Sneering, he replied — "The plan is worthless. Lady

Iwa is chastity itself. In the absence of this Iémon no man is allowed entrance to the house."

Kwaiba knitted his brows — "Kakusuké! Kakusuké!" As the servant appeared — "Go yonder to the house of Akiyama Chōzaémon San. Say that the Kumigashira would speak with Akiyama San." As the man departed — "Chōzaémon is the man. For gossip and malice he is a very woman. Rejoice and he weeps; weep and he rejoices. If

Akiyama cannot concoct some plan to get rid of Lady Iwa, then no one can.... Alas! Lady Hana and Iémon must die by the hand of this Kwaiba. Kibei will give his aid."

The old man and Kibei got much enjoyment out of the cowardice of Iémon and the fright of Lady Hana. But not for long.

Akiyama Chōzaémon, the one-time boy lover of Lady Iwa; a long, lean, hungry-looking man, with long, cadaverous face and

a decidedly bad eye, appeared with the servant Kakusuké close behind.

The latter seemed a sort of policeman attending the none-too-willing Chōzaémon. The latter's brow lightened at sight of the company. He owed Kwaiba money.

Sending away the servant, Kwaiba unfolded the situation.

Said Chōzaémon — "Heigh! Tamiya takes the cast off woman

of Itō Dono. Fair exchange is no robbery; Kibei Uji against Lady Hana San. Iémon San goes into the matter with eyes wide open. The lady is an old intimate, it is said."

This manner of approaching the subject was Chōzaémon's way. He cared nothing for the scowls of Kibei nor the wrath of Kwaiba. He was needed, or they would not have called him to counsel.

As for Iémon, he was grateful to Chōzaémon; as neighbor, and for the insult to Kibei and Kwaiba.

Continued the mediator — "The obstacle of course is the incubus. Lady Iwa is to be driven out. And Watanabé won't answer? Maa! Chastity in an incubus! It is a thing unheard of. 'Tis such, once of womankind, who seduce living men.

“Tamiya is now head of the House. Lady Iwa once driven out, the property remains in his hands as its representative. She must be forced to leave of her own will. Good; very good. What is it worth to Kwaiba Dono?"

"Look to Iémon for commission," said Kwaiba roughly.

"Nay! Nay!" retorted Chōzaémon. "Kwaiba is Kwaiba; Iémon is Iémon. The two are to be settled with separately. If Kwaiba Dono had gone to

extremes at the start no question would have been raised. To do so now, with all present and after discussion, is out of the question.

“Kwaiba Dono wishes to adopt Kibei Uji; to get rid of Lady Hana San. Iémon San has been neatly trapped. He must consent. Lady Hana is a woman. She has no voice in the matter. All this is clear. But as to Chōzaémon's labour in the affair; that it is which interests

this Akiyama." He gave a sour reprimanding look at Kibei.

Then he looked impertinently from Kwaiba to Iémon, and from Iémon to Kwaiba. Iémon in delight nodded assent. Chōzaémon promptly turned his back on him and faced Kwaiba.

At first the old man was very angry at the acuteness of Chōzaémon. The sharp, free exposure did not please him. Then the idea of countering on

this acuteness made him good tempered.

He grumbled — "The ten ryō owing to Kwaiba at the New Year — principal and interest; such is the fee for a successful issue."

Chōzaémon held up his hands in pretended horror — "Pay back borrowed money! Is that expected by the Kumigashira?"

"Not 'expected,'" put in Kwaiba promptly. "With the seal of

Akiyama San the return is assured."

Chōzaémon became thoughtful — "It is true. The last loan was under seal.... Too bad.... Well! Well! The conditions are hard. Submission is necessary. The debt will be forgiven?"

"Kibei and Iémon stand as witnesses," replied Kwaiba.

"Then how is this?" said Chōzaémon. All put their heads

together. Akiyama Chōzaémon went into details.

Kwaiba pushed back his cushion; slapped his thighs. "Chōzaémon, you are cheap at double the money. Just the thing! Eh, Iémon, Uji? Eh, heir San?"

All grinned a raptured assent.

CHAPTER 11: THE PLOT DEVELOPS

For two days Iémon was maturing the preliminaries. He

seemed unwell and out of sorts. The third day he did not get up at all.

Lady Iwa was properly anxious. Said she — "The change in the year is a sickly season. Condescend to take some medicine. Allow Suian Sensei to be summoned."

Iémon grumbled a dissent.

Lady Iwa went on in her conern — "He is the very prince of doctors. See: here is a salve he

recommends; for skin and nerves. Lady Hana San, the beautiful concubine of Itō Sama, uses nothing else. He guarantees it on her praise, as means to remove blemishes of any kind or source."

Iémon looked up quickly. The connection puzzled and did not please him.

Perhaps he noted a puffiness about Lady Iwa's face, remembered a repulsion toward marital usages.

The women should leave the men to play their own game. He said gruffly — "Suian! A dealer in cosmetics and charms. Have naught to do with his plasters and potions; as cheats or something worse. As for Lady Iwa, she is black as a farm hand from Ryūkyū. Lady Hana is fair as the white kiku. Can the pastes of Suian Sensei change black to white?"

Startled, Lady Iwa looked round from the glass into which she

was peering. She was taken by surprise. In their personal relations Iémon had always been more than considerate.

For some weeks in secret she had been using this medicine of Suian Sensei. In childhood Lady Iwa had shown something of an epileptic tendency. This had worn off with time. Of late the recurrence had alarmed her.

The drug of Suian, at the time anyhow, made her less conscious of the alarmed critical

feeling which heralded the inception of the attacks.

Iémon gave her but time to catch the meaning of his insult.

He went on — "Probably it is but a cold. Some eggs, with plenty of hot wine, will obviate ill effects. Deign to see that they are prepared."

The channel of Lady Iwa's thoughts changed. At once she was the housekeeper and nurse,

and all solicitude to make him at ease.

In the course of the meal of eggs with saké in came Natsumé Kyuzō and Imaizumi Jinzaémon.

"Ah! Iémon, pardon the intrusion. Probably the engagement of yesterday with Kwaiba Sama was forgotten.... In bed! A cold? But such is no treatment for the complaint. There should be a cheerful, lively atmosphere.... Ah! Here is

the dice box. One can shake dice as well lying down as sitting. Deign to refresh the spirits with play as well as wine."

Iémon saw to it that both were available.

With surprise at first, misgiving afterwards, Lady Iwa heated bottle after bottle of saké. The men did not pay the slightest attention to her presence. Absorbed in their game, there was but a rough call from time

to time for wine, addressed to the air, a servant, anybody.

At the end of the play Natsumé rose to leave in high spirits. Imaizumi and Tamiya were correspondingly depressed. This was but a first day's procedure. Day after day, for the space of half the month, the play was repeated. Iémon had long since recovered.

One day he stood with his hands shoved into the folds of his sash. He was very sober and sour.

"Iwa, is there money in the house?"

She looked at him in surprise.

He explained, "Matters have not turned out at all well with Kyuzō and Jinzaémon. This Iémon is a hundred ryō to the bad. With spare cash at hand an attempt can be made to repair the loss with a new game."

Lady Iwa prostrated herself before him. "May the Danna deign to reconsider. To Iwa this

pastime of gambling seems a very ill one, particularly in a man of official rank. It is fraught with peril; and the offence once known rarely is pardoned. Condescend to hear and forgive the warning of this Iwa."

She stopped a little frightened. Iémon was looking at her in greatest wrath and astonishment.

"What! Is there argument from wife to husband? This insolence of behaviour crowns the insult

of refusal! The very sight of your face is enough to make one sick at the stomach! Boors and bakémono are shut out at the neighborhood barrier! But you — the guards have been put to sleep, and you have slipped through! Shut up! Get the money, or....!"

Lady Iwa crouched at the shōji, in terror and surprise. The insulting words heaped on her pained and tortured.

Now she felt the sharp sting of a hand forcibly applied to her cheek.

Without a word she left the room. Returning she brought thirty ryō in gold on a salver.

Timidly prostrate she presented it to Iémon. "Condescend to pardon Iwa. That she is ugly and incompetent she knows. Did not Iémon accept her?"

The man stuffed the gold in his girdle. In reply — "No: Iémon

was cheated by Kondō and Chōbei. An ugly woman — perhaps; but a monster, a worse than rokurokubi, was never thought of even in a dream. Compensation is to be found. Iémon likes gambling. He will gamble. Have a care to supply the needed funds; and don't interfere."

Roughly he shoved her out of the way, and left the house.

For long Lady Iwa saw nothing of Iémon; but she heard from him.

In fact he was living in semi-secrecy at the house of Rokurōbei. Now this messenger, then that, would come to Lady Iwa. "If there is no money — sell something. The bearer will indicate. A supply must be found."

Thus one thing after another left the house — to be stored in the basement of Kondō

Rokurōbei, to whose clever suggestion was due this way of stripping Lady Iwa of all she possessed.

With goods and clothes went the servants. In the course of a few weeks Lady Iwa was living in one room, furnished with three mats in lieu of the usual twelve in number.

Brazier, night lamp, the single garment she wore, this was all she possessed in the house.

Then at last she saw him. The light dawned on a cold snowy morning of early March.

Lady Iwa rose, opened the amado, and started her day. About 9am the shōji were pushed aside and Iémon entered.

He looked as if fresh from a night's debauch. His garments were dirty and disordered. His face was sallow, the eyes deep set and weary, his manner

listless. Lady Iwa gave him the only cushion in the room.

Seated before the brazier after some time he said — "A million pardons: the luck has been very bad.... Ah! The place here seems in disorder. It is not fit for a man to live in."

He looked around as one waking from a dream. "No wonder: yet all can be restored. Iémon has surprised you?"

Said Lady Iwa timidly — "Matters are a little at odds and ends. Lady Iwa needs but little; a stalk of raddish and a handful of wheat. Does the Danna remain here? If so...." There was a painful hitch in her voice, a puzzled look on her face. She had one bu in cash. In fact she was hoping for the monthly visit of Yosuké the farmer; if there was a farm any longer. She did not know.

"For the night," answered Iémon. "Sleep and food are the essentials of good play. All has been lost in the gambling houses of Shinjuku and Shinagawa, at the Nakanochō. Is there no money in the house?... Evidently not. Deign to secure some, no matter how." He took the silver bu she presented to him. "At least a bath and tobacco can be had. See to it that a meal is ready at seven; not much, sashimi and

wine. Iémon would play, not eat." With this he rose.

Lady Iwa heard the sound of the closing gate.

Long she remained, her face buried in her knees. In this gloomy situation what was she to do?

She looked around. There was not a thing to sell; not even herself. Who would buy the ugly Lady Iwa?

An idea came into her head. In a moment she was in the street.

Soon she stood at the door of her uncle, Yoémon. With this uncle and aunt she had but little to do. Matazaémon had been at daggers drawn with his brother, whom he accused of being a wretched miser, one acquiring wealth by very questionable means for a samurai.

In old days Chōbei had been a hired agent of Yoémon. The principal had escaped; the

second had to leave Yotsuya and its neighborhood.

The aunt came out at Lady Iwa's call. She greeted her niece with surprise.

"Oh! Oh! Iwa is a stranger to this house. It has been heard that a splendid heir was received at Tamiya."

The old woman looked at Lady Iwa shrewdly, and not without kindness.

Lady Iwa took heart.

She made answer — "It is true; of late matters have not gone well. Just now Iwa would ask the loan of two quarts of rice, together with a quarter to buy eels or sashimi. It is very rude indeed...."

"Very rude indeed!" said a harsh voice close by.

Lady Iwa shrank to the outer part of the doorway. The aunt fled to the inner part of the house.

Continued Yoémon — "And what is Iwa doing at the house of Yoémon? That there is relationship between them this Yoémon does not recognize.

“Yoémon never exchanged look or word with his brother Matazaémon, nor does he desire to do so with the issue. Let the Tamiya of Samonchō look out for itself. An heir was taken without aid or advice of Yoémon. A stranger, one practising wayside divination, this fine

fellow turns out a gambler and a debauched man, to the ruin of the House.

“Iwa can look to him; ignorant and foolish woman that she is. This Yoémon would contribute to the needs of a beggar before granting even a single mon to Iwa."

The grating rattled sharply as the angry old man pushed it to and let fall the bar.

Lady Iwa looked into the dark recess with pained and startled eyes. So much of a recluse, she was learning that Iémon had long been the talk of the neighborhood.

She turned, and slowly took her way back to Samonchō.

Here the reaction came. Strong was the inclination to laugh and weep; too strong for self-control. In alarm she ran to take from the closet the medicine of Suian.

Its effect was the opposite of what she expected — or perhaps it was taken too late.

For an hour Lady Iwa writhed, screamed, laughed in her agony.

Then she sank into slumber.

On awakening the sun was already well past the zenith. She sprang up in alarm.

This meal to prepare — the duty of the wife — and not a step taken.

It could not be helped. Just as she was, twisting a towel around her disordered hair, she started out to the place of one Kuraya Jibei of the Asakusa Kuramaé no Saka.

This man was a lender on the notes from the rice pensions of the samurai — a fudasashi dealer, as these men were called.

The distance was great. Lady Iwa was tired out on her arrival.

At the entrance the shop boy hailed her sharply. He waved her off. "No! No! Old girl, it won't do. Nothing is to be had here. Please come back the day before yesterday." He barred the way.

Said Lady Iwa, shrinking back — "Nothing is wanted of the honoured house. An interview with Jibei San, an inquiry to make. Such the request."

Something about tone or manner, certainly not pity, made

the boy hesitate — "Jibei San! A beggar woman wants an interview with Jibei San! How about it?"

"Nothing to be had," answered the bantō's voice. "Tell her to read the white tablet hung before the entrance. It is all the house has to give." In speaking he edged around a little.

Lady Iwa raised the towel from her face.

At once the bantō was on his feet. "Ah! For long the honoured lady of Tamiya has not been seen. Many and profitable the dealings with Matazaémon Dono. Condescend to pardon this senseless fellow. He outrivals his companions in lack of brains. Deign to enter."

The boy was all apology — "Condescend wholly to pardon. Deign to have pity on the ignorance shown. With fear and respect...."

Looking into Lady Iwa's face he was overcome by his feelings of mockery. Bursting with laughter he fled to the front of the shop to stuff the dust rag into his mouth in mistake for a towel. This slight error restored his equanimity.

The bantō looked after him with some fellow feeling and much anger. "He is half idiot. Condescend to disregard his rude speech and manner. After all he is but a boy.... What can

this Jibei do for the lady of Tamiya?"

"Knowing that the House has dealings with Jibei San, and there being necessity for three shō of rice, it is ventured to ask the loan." Thus spoke Lady Iwa.

Money, actual coin, was on the end of her tongue, but somehow she could not get the words out.

Jibei was not particularly astonished. Since Iémon had taken charge of the affairs of

Tamiya, its income was usually discounted well beforehand.

Moreover, the rumour of Iémon's gambling was spreading among his connections. Neither Kwaiba nor Akiyama, nor the others engaged, were men to lose sight of the likelihood of fine pickings from the Tamiya.

Jibei made prompt answer. "Respectfully heard and understood. It shall be sent.... Ah! It is required now? Matsu!

Matsu! Put up three shō of rice for the lady of Tamiya. Its conveyance is to be provided. Place a bu in the parcel. The distance to Yotsuya is great. The cart men are exacting."

Lady Iwa's heart leaped with gratitude at the perspicacity of Jibei.

He watched her departing figure as far as he could see it.

Then he took out a ledger; and against the name of Tamiya he placed a question mark.

It was dusk when Lady Iwa entered the house at Samonchō. She gave a start on finding Iémon glumly seated before the fireless brazier.

He said, "A fine hour for a woman to be gadding the street. And the meal! Unprepared: excellent habits in a wife!"

"To the Danna apology is due. This Iwa is much in the wrong. But for the meal money had first to be secured...."

"Then there is money, or means to procure it? Where is it? How much?"

"Nay, the rice is here. This bu is enough to secure eels, sashimi, some delicacy...."

She hesitated before Iémon's doubting glare. He was eyeing rice and money.

The mark on the bag caught his eye.

"Whence was this rice had? And this money? From Jibei, the fudasashi dealer? A visit paid in such garb? Truly the House is disgraced, not only by your ugliness, but by ill conduct! Who could remain in such a den?"

Lady Iwa threw herself in his way as he rose to leave the room.

Clinging to his sleeve she pleaded for pardon, as only a woman can do who has done no wrong.

There was an ugly look on Iémon's face as he turned on her.

Frightened, she would have fled. Instead she could only crouch like a dog under the blows he showered on her.

Then with a violent kick in the groin he rolled her over, and departed.

In time Lady Iwa heard footsteps. Had Iémon returned? Despite the pain, she half sat up in her dread.

Kondō Rokurōbei appeared. The portly man held up his hands in horror and benevolence at what he saw.

"But Lady Iwa — what has occurred? Ah! Kondō has heard

rumours of what is going on. The mats, screens, drawers, clothes-baskets — the house is completely stripped to satisfy the thirst for the money of others! Now he has descended to blows! Truly he is a miserable fellow."

Kondō's voice grew loud in his wrath. "This must not go on! Rokurōbei is responsible to Tamiya, to the ancestors. To be subject to a fellow like this will never do. A divorce is to be

secured. Let him depart with his plunder. Let him have everything; only to get rid of him. He is husband, and head of Tamiya. But Kondō will be too much for him! A divorce shall be secured. Itō Dono, the neighborhood chief, is to be interested in the affair. Pressure shall be put on Iémon to grant the letter of divorce."

Indignation choked the worthy man.

Lady Iwa spoke slowly, with pain and effort. "Be in no such haste, Kondō Sama. Iémon has not been a good man. Much is known to this Iwa. He buys women at Nakachō. He buys geisha. He gambles. These are a man's vices. As to these Iwa has nothing to say. She is the wife, for two lives to maintain the house in good and ill fortune. A good wife does not look to divorce to rectify mistakes. With such remedy Iwa has nothing to do. But is not Kondō Sama the

marriage broker? Was he not the mediator in the marriage between Iémon and Iwa? Deign to speak as marriage broker. Rebuke Iémon. Cause this gambling to be brought to an end."

Rokurōbei could hardly hear her to the end.

His testy impatience was in evidence. He broke into protest — "This is complete madness; utter folly. You allow this fellow

to ruin the House. He will dispose of the pension."

"The goods, the House, Iwa, all belong to Iémon; to do with as he pleases. Iwa is the wife. She must submit— Ah! You refuse. Kondō Sama is no longer the friend of Iwa, to act as marriage broker."

What had come into the soul of this gentle woman? Kondō in fright shrank back from the look she gave him — "A very demon!” He cried — “The

mother, Lady Mino, has returned to life! Oni! Oni! You are not human! Kondō assuredly will have nothing to do with Lady Iwa, or Lady Iwa's affairs!"

He left her helpless in the middle of her fit. Forgetting in his fright even his clogs, barefooted, he fled from the house in Samonchō.

CHAPTER 12: KWAIBA'S REVENGE

Kondō Rokurōbei went direct to the council of the conspirators.

He found them assembled in the house of Itō. Kwaiba, Iémon, Lady Hana, Chōzaémon, Kibei, were drinking saké.

Kwaiba as usual was bragging over his prowess in youth extended into age. Lady Hana was laughing at him behind his

back. Kibei was surly; yet his share of income was assured.

Kwaiba roundly berated Iémon for lack of energy. "Lady Iwa has been allowed to get the upper hand. Iémon is far too soft to deal with a woman who has been spoiled all her life!"

Iémon listened in silence, with a rather doubtful smile of acquiescence or contempt.

In fact, knowing Lady Iwa as he did, he had little confidence in

Kwaiba or Chōzaémon, or the methods they proposed. His own plan was maturing. Meanwhile in part it ran parallel.

On this assembly burst the discomfited Rokurōbei — "Ah! What an experience! The woman is a very fiend. A new pair of geta, bought but yesterday, and left at your house, Iémon Uji!"

Iémon looked at Kondō's frightened face and bare feet.

Then he burst into a roar of laughter.

Kwaiba was indignant. "Is the fright of Kondō San any license to bring his dirty feet on the mats? Deign, good sir, to accept water for the cleansing. Lady Hana San now is inmate of the house of Kondō; yet condescend for the moment to act the mistress here."

This was part of the arrangement. With the goods of Lady Iwa the person of Lady

Hana had been transferred to the charge of the honest Rokurōbei. There Iémon had easy and decent access to the use of both.

Said Iémon — "What happened after this Iémon left Samonchō? Kondō Dono has been frightened."

Kondō puffed and fumed as he cleansed his feet at the mounting step. He groaned — "Iémon Dono, you are certainly done for. Was it 'three years,'

she said? Her face was frightful. This Rokurōbei has no more to do with the affair. He goes no more to Samonchō. Alas! He will never sleep again. Oh! Oh! To be haunted in the next existence by such a rotten incubus!"

Said Kwaiba — "Did Iémon really beat her? He says he did."

Answered Kondō — "She could barely move a limb. Of love for Iémon not a spark is left; but she clings to the honour of

Tamiya, to the wife's duty to the House. There is no moving her. Rokurōbei is suspect, as not doing his duty as marriage broker. Look to yourselves. If she ever gets suspicious of the real facts, has an inkling of the truth — look out for yourselves!"

Kwaiba was thoughtful; Iémon was indifferent. None of them could think of aught but the venture already engaged in.

Ten days, passed.

In that time every effort was made to move Lady Iwa to consent to a divorce.

As Kumigashira, Kwaiba summoned her to his house.

Before his kindly sympathy Lady Iwa melted into tears. The scandalous treatment of Iémon had reached his ears. Why had he not heard of it before it reached such extremes?

He looked indignation at his messenger, the one who had

brought Lady Iwa to his presence, Akiyama Chōzaémon, the neighbor of Tamiya, living not far off near the Ten-ō.

Said the Kwaiba — "This Kwaiba always took Iémon, or Kazuma, for a scoundrel. A stranger, why bring him into the home? But now he is master of Tamiya. In the place of the excellent, if obstinate, Matazaémon. Alas! The income of the House is said to be owed to the lenders for five years. And the household

goods; and separate properties of Tamiya — all gone?"

Lady Iwa nodded assent, and Kwaiba threw up his hands at such wickedness.

At all events he counselled her to consider matters, to accept his aid. He would place her somewhere; in the country and far off from the city in which Iémon as master of Tamiya in its degradation would always be an unpleasant sight and influence in her life; at least until Iémon

could be expelled. With the fellow's past career doubtless this would happen before long.

Meanwhile Lady Iwa was to pass into one of the wretched, overworked, exhausted drudges on one of Kwaiba's Shimosa farms.

From his chief's expressed views Chōzaémon dissented.

This was the one man Lady Iwa distrusted. He had always shown dislike to her.

In his defense of her conduct Chōzaémon was too clever to show any warmth. He was simply the subordinate making exact report to his chief.

Lady Iwa was completely taken in. This friendly neutrality aroused her every grateful feeling.

Said Chōzaémon — "Iémon is a coward. A samurai beats neither woman nor dog. If either are unfaithful to him, he kills the offender. Iémon's conduct has

been thoroughly bad. Before the reproaches of Lady Iwa San, beaten in argument he has retaliated by beating her to a jelly. Her face bears the marks of his violence. As to her body, my wife answers for it that it is a mass of bruises."

"Is that so?" said Kwaiba in deep sympathy.

Lady Iwa burst into tears.

Kwaiba fumed with rage — "Truly Iémon is not a human

being. He has the horns of a demon."

Then the priest Myōzen, of the family temple, the Myōgyōji of Samégabashi, appeared at the Samonchō house.

To him Lady Iwa looked for ghostly consolation against the ills of this world.

Instead he merely chanted the old refrain, harped on the scandal brought on Samonchō

by the continued bickering of the married pair.

Husband and wife had mutual duty toward each other; but also there was a duty toward their neighbors. Iémon was irreclaimable.... This stranger! Lady Iwa San should deign to take the active part herself; not afford this ill spectacle and example to the neighborhood.

Like most parsons he was convinced by the noise of his own voice, and spoke with the

intense conviction of long rehearsal.

Lady Iwa heard him out with a curious chill at heart.

The graves of her beloved departed ones were in the cemetery of Myōgyōji.

The temple had been one of the few generous features, almost extravagances, of Matazaémon. It had profited greatly by his donations.

It was the honour of her House pitted against the argument of the priest and the convenience of the neighbors; and all because a bad man had been brought into it.

Lady Iwa said at last, "What the revered priest has said reaches to the heart of this Iwa. Submission is to be an inspiration from the revered departed. Iwa will seek their counsel."

Baffled, the priest left the house; veiled censure was on his lips.

Open disobedience and contempt was on the part of Lady Iwa.

Said Kwaiba — "Chōzaémon has failed. At least this Kwaiba has saved his ten ryō — and gained one object. Kondō Dono, thanks for your kind hospitality to Lady Hana San. Do you propose to adopt her?"

Kondō made an emphatic gesture of protest and dissent. He said — "At least Kondō has the security of goods and money for his generous expenditures."

"Both of them belonging to Lady Iwa San; just as Kwaiba holds the acknowledgment of Akiyama San." Chōzaémon made a wry face.

The prospect of pressure put on him, with all the added accumulation of the months of interest, was not a cheerful one.

Said Kwaiba angrily — "Ah! Whoever would have suspected such obstinacy in the incubus; she who always was so yielding within her home and outside of it. She seemed to be such an easy mark. It was merely a matter of ordering her out. And now she baffles this Kwaiba of his revenge!"

Iémon laughed outright.

Kwaiba looked at him with surprise. Was this charlatan playing a double game?

Said Iémon — "Fear enters at the words of the honoured chief. Pray condescend to be easy in mind. As yet Chōzaémon has not failed. At least the question can be argued with the Kumigashira. It is left to these principals. Iémon is of better counsel." Then after a silence during which Kwaiba intently eyed him — "To-morrow Lady Iwa San leaves Yotsuya. Kwaiba Dono gets his revenge on the late master of Tamiya. Pray remember it, in favour of the

present incumbent of the House."

Said Kwaiba fervently — "Iémon would be a son to Kwaiba! Is it really true — that the incubus will be expelled the neighborhood, in disgrace?"

Iémon nodded assent.

On the following day Lady Iwa had completed her ablutions. She arrayed herself in freshly washed robes.

Then she took her place before the Butsudan. It was memorial day of the dearly departed.

Earnestly she prayed — "Deign, honoured dead, to have regard to this Iwa. The year has not lapsed since the hand of Iwa was placed in that of Iémon. Now the House is brought to ruin. No heir appears to console this Iwa and to continue its worship, to inherit its revenues.

“'Take these in hand. Life lies before Iémon for their

enjoyment. His revenue will be ample. Deign but to have the honour of the House in mind, the continuance of its line as object.' Such were the words of the honoured Matazaémon when in life.

“Unworthy has been the conduct of this trust by Iémon. But divorce is a scandal, always to be avoided by a woman. Return the love of Iémon to this Iwa. Deign, honoured dead, to influence his wandering

passions toward this child of the House. Cause the husband to return to Tamiya, once more to uphold its rights and influence. Such is the prayer of this Iwa."

She rose, placed the offerings, and struck the little bell with the hammer.

As she did so a noise was heard at the entrance.

Iémon, carrying fishing rod and basket, and followed by Natsumé Kyuzō and Imaizumi

Jinzaémon, burst into the room. All three were more or less drunk.

Dumfounded Lady Iwa looked from one to the other.

Imaizumi carried a tub. Kyuzō knocked it from his shoulders. Then tumbled clumsily down on the cask.

None of them had removed the dirty straw sandals they wore.

"Why do so in such a barn?" hiccoughed Kyuzō. "And this

saké; Kyuzō found it without, at the kitchen door. Jinzaémon shouldered it. Whence does it come, Iémon San? Faugh! It smells as if the cask had been placed for the convenience of passers-by on the wayside. It stinks. That's what it does."

He gave the cask a kick, knocking out the bung. The filthy liquid poured out on the floor.

Iémon appropriated the tub. He seated himself on it. "'Tis the

fine liquor of Tamiya. All the house possesses. Iémon is hungry."

Opening his basket he took out an eel. He began to skin it.

A cry from Lady Iwa arrested him. His wife sank down before him in attitude of prayer.

"Importunate jade!” Iémon scoffed, “What would you now? Further advice to a husband who wants but to get rid of the sight of an ugly face? Bah! This

lump of a wench is neither good for child-bearing nor for house-keeping; she is not even a good caretaker." His knife made a rip in the skin of the squirming animal.

Lady Iwa laid a hand on his sleeve. With a voice in which sobs mingled with the petition — "To-day is a memorial day of the honoured dead. Deign to refrain from taking life in the house; nay, before the very ihai in the Butsudan. Such deed will

cause pain to the honored dead; bring disaster on the House, perhaps on this Iwa and Iémon San!"

Iémon fairly roared as he sprang up from the tub — "What! You noisy slut! Is this Iémon to go without food because the dead dislikes the smell of eels?... Jinzaémon, can you cook eels?"

Imaizumi had sought the rōka. His round featureless face showed his fright and indecision

before this critical quarrel of husband and wife. Of all involved in the plot he was the most unwilling in performance of his rôle.

But he answered according to rote — "Iya! Iémon Uji, the office of cook is a special one. Jinzaémon is no cook. He leaves that office to his wife. Moreover the cooking of eels is an art in itself." —

"And the artist is here," chimed in the malignancy of Kyuzō.

"Lady Iwa San is noted for her skill."

"Right!" said Iémon. "Kyuzō and Jinzaémon have heard the refusal of Lady Iwa. Cook this eel — or else Iémon pronounces the formula of divorce against the disobedient wife."

In silence Lady Iwa rose.

She went to the portable stove. With the bellows she stirred up the fire therein.

She did not dare even for a moment to pray at the Butsudan.

The skillet was on the fire. The eels were sizzling in the hot liquor.

Suddenly Iémon made an exclamation. Taking a towel he grasped the handle of the vessel.

The next moment he had forced down the hot pan and its

contents on the head of Lady Iwa.

"Kiya!" With the single cry she fell over backwards, writhing in pain under the infliction of the scalding mess streaming over face, neck, and bosom.

Imaizumi fled in dismay. Even Natsumé Kyuzō protested. Seizing the arm of Iémon — "Iémon Uji, you go too far. Don't kill her."

"Kill the incubus? It's impossible." Iémon spoke coldly.

He was the one person of collected wits in the room.

Groaning with agony Lady Iwa came to her senses. A man was leaning over her.

Half blind as she was, she could recognize Chōbei. His look was grave.

His voice was reticent and confused. "What has been going on here, Lady Iwa Dono? Ah!

Chōbei comes at a bad season. Ma! Ma! The house, too; stripped bare to the very boards, and the season still wintry. Truly this Iémon is a beast — a very brute. What is Chōbei to do? There is this matter of the honour of Tamiya."

He wrung his hands as in great perplexity, glancing sideways toward Lady Iwa.

The first part of his speech she disregarded. Such talk and consolation were growing stale.

That all should pity her caused no surprise. Her situation was not unusual.

It was the last words which caught her ear. "The honour of Tamiya: Chōbei San?"

Chōbei turned away; to put some spice in his eyes. Tears stood in them as he turned again to her.

Lady Iwa was alarmed. "What has happened?" She caught his sleeve, drew close to him.

He answered — "Chōbei cannot speak. To find Lady Iwa San in such dreadful state renders it impossible to explain. Iémon San has gone too far."

So he had, from Chōbei's point of view and for his purposes. These young fellows never can keep within bounds; even in abuse of a woman. His resentment was extreme.

Lady Iwa insisted. Finally the resistance of Chōbei was overcome.

Iémon's name was posted at the Kuramaé of Asakusa.

He was in debt on every side. As the final blow, he had stolen the seal of Itō Kwaiba and forged an acknowledgment for twenty ryō.

Kwaiba's enmity to Matazaémon was well known. He liked Iémon no better, and would pursue him to the end, force him to cut belly, and accomplish the official degradation and extinction of the Tamiya House. What is to be

done?" He turned squarely to Lady Iwa.

She said — "Itō Dono has been kind to Lady Iwa. Perhaps if request be made...."

Chōbei laughed. "Itō Kwaiba is always kind to a woman. It is not Lady Iwa San whom he hates. But this is an affair between men. He secures vengeance on Matazaémon through Iémon and this official extinction of Tamiya. It is too tempting. He is not to be

trusted. No hint of the deed must reach him. Is there no money at the command of Lady Iwa San? The sum is but twenty ryō. Iémon brought this news to Chōbei last night. He leaves Edo, to go in hiding, after ... after ... punishing the ... Well! Well! He is a wicked man. Chōbei never suspected such wickedness. But Iémon is not the issue. He represents and can disgrace the Tamiya. There lies the issue. Has Lady Iwa San no means, nothing in coin?"

"Less than a bu, sixty mon." She held out the coppers to Chōbei.

Said Chōbei with decision — "There is one resource left. There is the person of Lady Iwa San. Deign to go into service at the pleasure quarter. Chōbei is skilful. In seven days these wounds can be healed. Twenty ryō secured, the paper is taken up, the robbery of the seal is never discovered. We can laugh at Kwaiba's anger. All is for the Tamiya."

He noted that Lady Iwa was hesitating — "It is but as a pledge. The money is advanced on the person of Lady Iwa San. A week, ten days, and other sources of loan will be discovered. This is the only measure Chōbei can suggest. He has no means of his own to meet this debt."

He smiled as at a thought — "Perhaps Kwaiba himself will pay his own debt!" He chuckled at the idea.

"Why not make appeal at once?" repeated Lady Iwa, grasping at any straw of safety from this recourse, so horrible to the samurai’s wife.

Said Chōbei promptly — "Itō Sama knows perfectly well the state of Samonchō. Asakusa, Honjō, are far removed. An appeal for twenty ryō as surety money in applying for a situation would appeal to him; the other would not. Besides, thus far away he could not

investigate closely, if he would. He could but say 'yes' or 'no.'" Lady Iwa remembered what Kwaiba had said — the necessity of removing to a distance. The words and actions of these rascals dove-tailed admirably."

A long silence followed.

With exultation at heart Chōbei saw her rise. She put out the fire, gathered together the few personal articles she still possessed. On seeing her

struggle with the heavy rain doors he came to her aid.

"For the time being accept the hospitality of Chōbei's poor quarters. These wounds are to be healed."

With full heart Lady Iwa gratefully accepted. She took his hand as if to kiss it.

Chōbei hastily snatched it away. In his sleeve, the ink not twenty-four hours old, was the paper of the sale of Lady Iwa to Chōbei;

her passing over to his guardianship, to dispose of as a street harlot, a night-hawk.

The consideration? Five ryō: payment duly acknowledged, and of course nominal.

The paper of transfer was in thoroughly correct form. Chōbei had drawn it himself.

CHAPTER 13: THE NIGHT-HAWKS OF HONJŌ

Lady Iwa's stay of nearly seven days at Chōbei's house was one of the golden periods of her life.

Lady Taki received the daughter of Tamiya house with humble joy. Iémon could not drop Chōbei out of his life of prosperity. Lady Iwa was soon brought in contact with the humble pair in adversity.

Hers was a generous heart, and Lady Taki could not look around her house without some indication of this kindness.

Her sympathy with the wronged wife was great. A husband — thriftless, a gambler, inconsiderate — of such a one she had some experience.

By the same means this lady was brought to her present pass. It roused her indignation.

As to brutality; that was another matter. She squared her stout shoulders and looked derisively at the loose angularity of Chōbei, his rickety physique. But the storm would pass.

Itō Sama, Kondō Sama, Myōzen Oshō, all these were agreed.

The daughter of the house now out of his reach, without a home to go to, and only hostile faces met with in the neighborhood, Iémon Sama would soon come to terms. Would the daughter of

the house deign to honour their humble home as long as she liked.

Lady Taki at once suppressed Lady Iwa's rather futile attempts to aid in her rough household work. It had been the lady's part to direct her maids in their more repugnant tasks, and now brought right under her hand in this plebeian household.

Lady Iwa never had undergone the harsher lot of her mother Lady Mino.

Chōbei in his way was as kind as his wife. At once he devoted himself to the repair of his property.

When Lady Iwa produced the paste and lotion of Suian Sensei, as balm for the complexion, Chōbei took them, smelled and carefully tasted, and finally put some of the paste on the end of the sticks to

arrange the charcoal in the brazier. A smell of garlic pervaded the room.

He noted the puffy face of Lady Iwa, the unnatural, almost ghastly, white of the skin where the wide pockmarks permitted it to be seen. Within the circles of these scars there was a curious striated effect, only seen at times in the efforts of artists to depict the supernatural, or of savages to frighten their foes.

It gave a drawn cadaverous look to the lower part of the face.

"There is more in it than that," mused Chōbei.

During her stay Lady Iwa had one of her attacks — of the muscles — in fact a true epileptic seizure.

Chōbei put an embargo at once on all remedies but his own.

Cynically, he added — "But elsewhere there will be no Chōbei. If the Okusama deigns

to apply the drugs of Suian Sensei where she now goes, doubtless she will find early relief. At present they spoil Chōbei's efforts."

The clever rascal at once recognized his fellow in Suian, bribed to render Lady Iwa more hideous than Nature had made her, to take away her womanhood and hope of an heir to the Tamiya.

To poison her? That he doubted; although the ignorance of both

leech and victim might readily lead to such result.

Within the seven days Lady Iwa San once more could show herself in public.

It was now Chōbei's part to carry the plot to completion.

Iémon, at the proposition, had said — "Sell her as a night-hawk! An ugly woman like that no one will approach."

"'Tis Chōbei's trade," said the pimp coolly. "In Yoshidamachi

they have noses — over night. Between dark and dawn the member melts, becomes distorted, and has to be made. It has served its purpose. This is Chōbei's affair. Provided that Lady Iwa never again troubles the presence of Iémon Sama the object is attained."

"That is true. Do what you please. Kill her, if desired. Lady Iwa in the Yotsuya; and Chōbei feels the wrath of Itō Dono, of this Iémon." Unwillingly he

signed the contract required by Chōbei.

He gave the latter a fee of ten ryō for the excision of this excrescence, and with a sigh of joy learned of the disappearance in company of the pimp and Lady Iwa.

Within three days carpenters and other workmen swarmed over the Tamiya manor in Samonchō. The master made ready for his return.

Lady Taki had gone forth on a mission for Chōbei. This would insure her absence for the greater part of the day.

Said Chōbei — "Deign, Okusama, to allow Chōbei to prove his art. All his accomplishments have not been displayed."

To pass off the ugly woman at night could be done. He was compelled to act by daylight; though relying somewhat on the

dusky interior of Toémon's entrance and reception room.

This Toémon was the chief of the guild which bought and controlled these unfortunate street-walkers, lowest of their class.

Chōbei sat down before Lady Iwa. As if in an actor's room he was surrounded with a battery of brushes and spatulas, pastes, paints of all shades of greys, flesh colour, pinks — even reds. Under his skilful hands Lady

Iwa was transformed. To make her beautiful was impossible. He made her passable.

The weather was cold, though spring was now close at hand.

Chōbei hesitated. The walk was a long one.

His handiwork might fade or melt under the sweating induced by effort. Besides he had no desire for conversation. There were to be as few

answers to curious questions as possible.

In his house he had left the two women to themselves, and saw Lady Iwa only when Lady Taki was present. So he called a litter and gave the necessary directions.

As the workmen moved off with their fair burden he trotted along in the rear, his project occupying his busy mind.

The place of Toémon was at Yoshidachō Nichōme, in the centre of the Warigesui district.

To the north was the canal of that name. To the south a second canal ditto; the second stream was the larger, fairer, and more pretentious South Warigesui. An equal distance to the east was the Hōonji Bashi, with the great temple of that name just across the bounding river or canal of the district.

As the litter bearers ambled down the bank of the North Warigesui, Lady Iwa thought she had never seen a more filthy stream than this back-water with its stale current.

The bearers put them down at the canal. Chōbei had some directions to give during the short walk of a couple of hundred yards to their destination.

Said he — "For a samurai’s wife to engage in this business is a

serious offence. After all the matter is mere form; a pledge to secure the return of the sealed paper forged by the husband. The wife performs her highest duty in saving the honour of the House. Is not that true?"

There was a little sob in Lady Iwa's voice as she gave assent.

She felt different now that she was close at hand to the scene and crisis of her trial.

Continued Chōbei — "The agreement has been made out as with Lady Iwa, daughter of Kanémon, the younger brother of this Chōbei and green-grocer of Abegawachō of Asakusa. Deign to remember that the twenty ryō is needed to save a father in peril of default and imprisonment."

"The cases are not so different," whispered Lady Iwa.

"Just so," said Chōbei. "Here is the place. Condescend to wait a

moment, here at the entrance." Briskly he entered the house. "A request to make!"

"Ah! Is it Chōbei San? The Danna Sama is absent for the day, at the office of the neighborhood magistrate. Some drunkard considers that he has been robbed. The girl he accused was punished — perhaps unjustly. All the women of this house are honest."

"Beyond repair," laughed Chōbei. "However, the other

matter has been agreed on. The girl is here. An uncontrollable jade! The master has deigned to aid Chōbei. Thanks are felt. Since she will run with the men, it is as well for Kanémon to get the profit of the business. If she breaks out — put a ring in her nose, and treat her as the farmers treat their cattle. Don't let her again bother home or Chōbei. She will lie — of course. At Toémon's they are used to lies?"

The woman Matsu laughed — "No fear as to that."

She looked over the contract with care. "Ah! She is sold for life service; otherwise the twenty ryō would be a scandalous price. Is that her?... Oh! Not a likely jade. Stand a little in the light.... This Matsu would never have closed the bargain without a view. But Toémon San has left no choice. In the scarcity of women, and his good-will to Chōbei San, he

would pay any sum. At twenty ryō she is a gem! You can come up here. Také! Haru! A new girl. Take her in charge and show her the house and its ways.... Chōbei San, some tea."

Chōbei put a word into this running comment and invitation.

As the girls were leading off the hesitating Lady Iwa he said loudly and roughly — "Remember to obey the Okamisan in everything.

Whatever she commands is right and must be done: no nonsense. Ah! Something forgotten: a moment please."

He drew Lady Iwa aside, seeing that she was on the verge of tears. Speaking gently — "Be astonished at nothing; be ignorant of everything. The house of Toémon in Honjō is not the drawing room of Tamiya in Yotsuya. Deign to remember that Chōbei must play his part. Life is like an excursion in a

pleasure boat. There are rough places to pass some danger, and much refuse to get rid of. Condescend to have House and husband in mind. It is but for a week — or so."

"And Iémon San, the House; they will be secure?"

"That Chōbei is assured of. See: he has the twenty ryō in hand. It is mere matter of securing the compromising paper and the return of Iémon. Some negotiations are necessary for

that. In the future his behaviour will be much improved." He clinked the coin before her.

As Lady Iwa passed up the stairs he returned to the brazier of the Okamisan. The tea was a short course.

Chōbei was on needles while drinking it. He feared an outbreak from above in the course of Lady Iwa's initiation into a vileness the depth of which she never even could suspect.

"Yes: trade is good. Women are difficult to secure. The men prefer to have them in their homes, rather than to gain by their service elsewhere." In such professional talk of a few moments he quickly dispatched the refreshment, climbed into his clogs, and departed.

Lady Iwa had disappeared far into the depths.

Toémon and his wife were quarrelling.

Said the woman — "Are you mad, to pay twenty ryō for such an ugly wench? No choice was given. This Matsu was to receive her. Chōbei is a cheat."

Toémon and the bantō drew Lady Iwa under the light, much as if she were a bag of rice — "The clever rascal! From crown of the head to neck she is all made up. And perhaps elsewhere."

"At all events she is a woman." The bantō spoke as in doubt.

"Never mind: we are great artists, too, if not so good at cheating as this Chōbei. Twenty-six years! She's forty at least.... What may be your honoured age?"

"Twenty-six years," replied the distressed Lady Iwa.

The wife threw up her hands — "And she does not lie!... Haru! Kōta! It is time to go out. The bell already strikes the hour of the dog. Take Iwa to the reception room. She is to learn

the ways of the place; where to entertain her guests.... Come! Along with all of you!"

Some ten or fifteen women had gathered in their array for their night's campaign.

Paint, powder, and plaster, disguised the ravages of disease among the hardened set of this low class house.

Lady Iwa accompanied Lady Haru to what had been called the reception room. The girl

explained to her: here was the place to bring and entertain any guest picked up on the street. They were not the degraded wretches who made the darkness of an alleyway the reception room for their lovers. It was to be remembered that the wine that was drunk not only profited the house, but paid in commissions for their own cosmetics and other little gratifications.

On entering the place Lady Iwa shrank back to the wall in horror; to shrink away in turn from the filth and obscenity to be seen on that support.

She would have fled, but the entering crowd pressed her further in.

It was a long room. The entrance formed a sort of parlour or place to sit. The rest of the apartment was divided longitudinally into little cubicula, rooms of the space of

the one dirty mat with which each was furnished. A shelf contained its cynically filthy and suggestive furniture.

Lady Iwa's disgust and terror was too obvious. Lady Haru held on to her arm to prevent flight. The attention of the others was drawn to them.

"Does the beauty want an apartment to herself? That is the privilege of the Oiran, the Go Tayu, the Kashiku. Ah! Sister dear; it is to be learned that this

place is Hell — First Block. There is no second block. One gets used to anything here; even to use a demon's horns for toothpicks." Thus spoke a hard-faced woman of some thirty odd, by her looks.

Said the frightened Lady Iwa in low tones — "Iwa has not come for this service. She is but a pledge. This redeemed, within the week she returns to her home. This place upsets one's stomach."

Those present laughed loudly. "We all say that. The real reason for our coming is not to be told. Be assured that you must perform the service, or suffer. Condescend not to fall into the hands of the Okamisan. In anger she is terrible."

There was a general movement of the women.

Said Lady Haru, drawing along Lady Iwa by the hand — "Come! Make no trouble. A newcomer,

you are sure to be successful and please Matsu Dono."

Lady Iwa resolutely held back. No matter what the suffering she would undergo it. Ah! A week in this place indeed was to be life in Hell.

She called up the sight of the dismantled house, the figure of her grandfather, anything to strengthen her will to resist.

Lady Haru left the room. "Okamisan, the new girl refuses

to serve. Haru makes report." The wife of Toémon leaped up from her cushion.

Dressed in night clothes, a long pipe in hand, she rushed into the room. "What nonsense is this? Which slut is it that refuses the service of the house?... You! The ink on the receipt for twenty ryō paid for your ugly face and body is hardly dry.... Pledge? A week's service? You lie: as your uncle said you would lie. You are here

for life service as a street harlot. Out with you!... No? No?"

She was about to throw herself on Lady Iwa, to cast her into the street. Then her passion, to outward appearance, cooled.

She was the woman of her business, malevolent and without pity. "Lady Kin! Lady Kin!"

The others now gathered around Lady Iwa. Lady Haru

and the girl Lady Také plead with her to obey. They tried to hustle her off by force.

Said Lady Haru — "Report had to be made. This Haru acted for the best. Truly such obstinacy deserves punishment. But Haru is filled with pity. Deign to obey. Go forth to the service. The result of refusal is terrible."

Lady Iwa shook her head — "Lady Haru San is free from blame. Iwa is grateful for the

kind words. To go out to this service is impossible."

The woman Lady Kin strode into the room; a big, strapping wench, and the understudy of Lady Matsu in her husband's affections.

"A new recruit?" She spoke in inquiry.

"Yes: and obstinate. It is a matter of punishment in the seméba.... Now! Out with you

all! No dawdling!" The irate woman turned on her flock.

They fled like sheep into the open.

CHAPTER 14: THE PUNISHMENT

Lady Iwa did not move.

The two women approached and laid hands on her. Her yielding made no difference in the roughness of their treatment.

Dragged, hustled, shoved, with amplitude of blows, she was already much bruised on reaching the place of punishment.

During a temporary absence of the mistress, a ray of kindliness seemed to touch the woman Lady Kin. She pointed to the square of some six feet, to the rings fastened in the rafters. "Don't carry self-will to extremes. Here you are to be stripped, hauled up to those rings, and beaten until the bow breaks. Look at it and take warning. Kin is no weakling."

She shoved back her sleeve, showing an arm as hard and

brawny as that of a stevedore. With disapproval she observed Lady Iwa.

The latter stood unresisting, eyes on the ground. Only the lips twitched from time to time.

As the only person in the house, male or female, not to fear the Okamisan, Lady Kin could only put down the courage to ignorance.

She shrugged her shoulders with contempt. "A man would

cause you no pain. The same cannot be said of Kin. You shall have the proof."

Perhaps severity would be more merciful, by quickly breaking down this obstinacy.

The Okamisan returned with the instrument of torture, a bow of bamboo wound with rattan to strengthen it.

Lady Kin took it, ostentatiously bent and displayed its stinging

flexibility before the eyes of Lady Iwa.

The latter closed them. She would cut off all temptation to weakness. At a sign Lady Kin roughly tore off Lady Iwa’s wide belt.

A twist, and the torn and disordered kimono of Lady Iwa fell to her feet with the skirt. She had no undershirt. Thus she was left completely naked.

In modesty she sank crouching on the ground. The cold wind of the March night made her shiver as Lady Kin roped her wrists.

Again the woman whispered her counsel in her ear — "When you get enough, say 'Un! Un!'"

Detecting no sign of consent she took a ladder, climbed up, and passed the ropes through the rings above. She descended, and the two women began to haul away. Gradually Lady Iwa

was raised from the sitting posture to her full height of extended arms, until by effort her toes could just reach the ground. In this painful position the slightest twist to relieve the strain on the wrists caused agonizing pains through the whole body.

"Still obstinate — strike!" shouted the wife.

Lady Kin raised the bow and delivered the blow with full force across the buttocks. A red

streak appeared. Lady Iwa by a natural contortion raised her legs.

The blows descended fast, followed at once by the raised welt of flesh, or the blood from the lacerated tissue. Across the shoulder blades, the small of the back, the buttocks, the belly, they descended with the full force of the robust arms and weight of Lady Kin.

Every time the legs were raised at the shock the suspended body spun round.

Every time the toes rested on the ground the bow descended with merciless ferocity.

The sight of the torture roused the fierce spirit in the tormentors. Lady Kin redoubled the violence of her blows, seeking out the hams and the withers, the shoulders, the tenderest points to cause pain.

The Okamisan ran from side to side, gazing into the face and closed eyes of Lady Iwa, trying to detect weakening under the torture, or result from some more agonizing blow.

Lady Iwa's body was striped and splashed with red. Lady Kin's hands slipped on the wet surface of the rod.

Suddenly she uttered an exclamation. Blood was now gushing from the nose, the eyes, the mouth of Lady Iwa.

"Okamisan! Okamisan! It won't do to kill her. Deign to give the order to cease. She must be lowered."

The Okamisan coolly examined the victim. "She has fainted. Lower her, and throw salt water over her. The sting will bring her to."

Lady Kin followed the instructions in the most literal sense. She dashed the bucket of water with great impetus right into Lady Iwa's face.

"Un!" was the latter's exclamation as she came to consciousness.

"She consents! She consents!" cried Lady Kin with delight.

The Okamisan was decidedly sceptical, but her aid plainly would go no further at this time. Said she — "Leave her as she is. There are other matters to attend to than the whims of an idle vicious jade. She would cheat this Matsu out of twenty ryō? Well: time will show the

victor." She departed — to drink her wine, pare her nails, and sing obscene songs to the accompaniment of the samisen.

Tied hand and foot Lady Iwa lay semi-conscious in the cold shed of punishment.

At midnight the girls returned to this home. They gathered around the prostate Lady Iwa.

From Lady Kin they had an inkling of the courage displayed. They admired her,

but none dared to touch her bonds.

At last Lady Haru San, unusually successful in her night's raid, ventured to approach the half drunk mistress of the house.

"Haru makes report." She spread her returns before the gratified Okamisan.

Timidly the girl added — "Lady Iwa San repents. Deign to remit

her punishment. She looks very ill and weak."

"Shut up!" was the fierce retort. Then as afterthought of sickness and possible loss came to mind. "She can be untied and sent to bed."

"And food?"

"She can earn it." The woman turned on Lady Haru, who bowed humbly and slipped away.

That night the girls contributed from their store to feed Lady Iwa; as they did on the succeeding days and nights.

The wife would have stopped the practice, but Toémon interfered. He meant to keep his dilapidated stock in as good repair as possible. He fed them pretty well. "The woman is not to be starved — at least too openly. The last case gave this Toémon trouble enough, and on the very day this epileptic came

into the house, to bring confusion with her. Beat her if you will; but not enough to kill her."

Lady Matsu followed his words to the letter. One beating was followed by another; with interval enough between the torture to insure recuperation and avoid danger to life. These scenes came to be regarded as a recreation of the house. The other inmates were allowed to

attend, to witness the example and fascinate their attention.

But at last the Okamisan despaired.

Amusement was one thing; but her hatred of Lady Iwa was tempered by the desire to find some use for her, to get a return for the twenty ryō of which she had been swindled.

Finally the advice of the bantō was followed. "The men of the house cannot be tempted to

approach such an apparition. The other girls have not time to devote to making up Lady Iwa as for the stage. They have not twenty ryō at stake, as had Chōbei. Let her wash the dishes."

Thus was Lady Iwa removed from her high estate as street-walker. Turned into a kitchen drudge she shed tears of joy.

She almost forgot the matter of the pledge in this new and pleasant life. The time and the

place, perhaps the medicine she took, had done their work on the mind of Lady Iwa.

Iémon, the house of Samonchō, the ihai in the Butsudan, the pleasant garden — all were of the tissue of a dream amid a toil which deposited her on the straw wrappings of the charcoal and in a shed, thoroughly worn out at the end of her long day.

The Lady Iwa of Samonchō at this end of the lapsing year of service was dormant.

But accidents will happen.

There was excitement in the house.

Mobei, the dealer in wardrobe articles — combs, brushes, jewel strings — was at the grating. The women were clustered before the wares he exposed in his trays. This Mobei wandered all the wards of Edo, his little trays fitting neatly into each other, and wrapped in a bundle-handkerchief.

His wares formed a marvellous collection of the precious and common place, ranging from true coral and tortoise shell, antique jewelry and curious netsuké of great value, to their counterfeits in painted wood, horn, and coloured glass. "

Mobei San, long has been the wait for you. Is there a bent comb in stock?" —

"Truly this Mobei is vexing. He humbly makes apology, lady. Here is just the thing.... How

much? Only a bu…. Too high? Nay! With women in the ordinary walks of life it is the wage of a month. To the honoured Oiran it is but a night's trifling."

The other women tittered.

Lady Haru was a little nettled at the high sounding title of Oiran. She would not show her irritation.

Mobei continued his attentions. He laid before her and the

others several strings of jewels, their "coral" made of cleverly tinted paste. "Deign to look; at but one bu two shū. If real they would cost twenty ryō."

"And Mobei has the real?" The dealer laughed. As in pity, and to give them a glimpse of the far off upper world, he raised the cover of a box in the lower tier. They gasped in admiration before the pink of the true coral. Hands were stretched through the grating to touch it.

Mobei quickly replaced the cover.

"For some great lady," sighed Lady Haru.

"Just so," replied Mobei, adjusting his boxes.

He had sold two wooden painted combs and a string of horn beads in imitation of tortoise shell. He pocketed the hundred copper coins.

Then briefly — "The necklace is for no other than the Kashiku of

the Yamadaya, the loved one of Kibei Dono of Yotsuya. The comb in tortoise shell and gold is for the honoured lady wife of Iémon Dono, the Go kenin. But Mobei supplies not only the secular world. This — for one who has left the world; for Myōzen Oshō of Myōgyōji, the gift of Itō Dono. For the custom of Mobei the Yotsuya stands first in order."

He took a box from his sleeve and showed them the rosary of

pure crystal beads. Even in the dull light of a lowering day the stones flashed and sparkled.

The women showed little interest. A priest to them was not a man — ordinarily.

He shouldered his pack.

"Mobei San — a comb with black spots, in imitation of tortoise shell. Please don't fail me on the next visit." Mobei nodded agreement. Then he halted and turned.

One of the women had called out in derision — "Here is Lady Iwa San. Surely she wants to purchase. Mobei San! Mobei San! A customer with many customers and a full pocketbook."

These women looked on Lady Iwa's assignment to the kitchen as the fall to the lowest possible state.

At sight of the newcomer Mobei gasped.

Lady Iwa on leaving the door of Toémon's house, soup strainers for repair in one hand, fifteen mon for tofu tightly clasped in the other, came face to face with the accessory dealer.

Gasped Mobei again — "The lady of Tamiya — here!"

"The lady of Tamiya!" echoed the astonished and curious women.

Said Lady Iwa quickly — "Mobei San is mistaken. This is Iwa; but

lady of Tamiya...." Hastily she pulled her head towel over her face.

In doing so the coins slipped from her hand.

A mon missing meant no tōfu; result, a visit to the seméba.

In recovering the lost coin Mobei was left in no doubt. "'Tis indeed the lady of Tamiya. It cannot be denied."

Lady Iwa no longer attempted the impossible. She said — "It is

Iwa of Tamiya. Mobei San, a word with you."

The women were whispering to each other.

"He called her 'shinzō.'" Said Lady Haru

"There always was something about her to arouse suspicion; so ugly, and with such grand airs. And how she endured the punishment! Truly she must be a samurai’s wife."

The minds of all reverted to their master Toémon, and how he would take this news.

Lady Iwa had drawn Mobei somewhat apart from the grating. With downcast face she spoke — "Deign, Mobei San, to say nothing in the neighborhood of this meeting with Iwa." To Mobei's earnest gesture of comprehension — "Affairs had gone badly with Tamiya. Iémon San was misled into gambling by Natsumé Kyuzō and

Imaizumi Jinzaémon. He was carried away by the passion. It was no longer possible to stay in Samonchō. Worse conduct followed. In the kindness and advice of Itō Dono, of Akiyama and Kondō Sama, this Iwa found support.

“But she disobeyed. She would not follow the advice given. However, gratitude is felt by Iwa. One cannot leave this place, or long since she would

have paid the visit of acknowledgment. A matter of importance arose. Chōbei San came to Iwa's aid, and saved the situation. This place is terrible, but the consequences of not coming would have been more so. To Chōbei gratitude is felt. It was the opportunity offered the wife to show her faith and courage."

Now she looked bravely in Mobei's face. It was the accessory dealer's turn to show

confusion — "Honoured lady, is nothing known?"

"Known?" answered Lady Iwa in some surprise. "What is there to know? When this Iwa left Samonchō to be sure the house was cracking apart everywhere. The light poured in as through a bamboo door.... Ah! Have matters gone badly with the Danna in Iwa's absence?"

Mobei shook his head in dissent.

"Alas! Itō Sama, Akiyama or Kondō San, has misfortune come to them, without a word of condolence from Iwa? Perhaps Chōbei San, in his precarious life...."

The poor isolated world of the thoughts of this homely creature was limited to these friends in need.

Mobei had sunk on his knees before her. He raised eyes in which stood tears of pity and indignation. "The daughter of

the house knows nothing of what has occurred in Yotsuya? This Mobei will not keep silent.

“With the affairs of Iémon Sama, of Itō Dono and Akiyama San nothing has gone wrong. The absence of the Lady Iwa is otherwise related: She has abandoned house and husband to run away with a plebeian, the bantō at the green-grocer's on Shinjuku road. Such is the story circulated."

Lady Iwa drew away from him as from a snake — then: "Mobei, you lie! Why tell such a tale to this Iwa? Are not the words of Itō Dono, of Akiyama Sama, of Chōbei San still in Iwa's ears? What else has she had to console her during these bitter months but the thought of their kindness? This ragged dress, these bare feet in this snow, this degraded life — are not they evidences of Iwa's struggle for the honour of husband and House? Mobei, slander of

honourable men brings one to evil. Mobei lies; lies!"

The man now was weeping. He seized her dress. "The lady of Tamiya is a saint. Alas! Nothing does she know of the wicked hearts of men. Too great has been the kindness of the daughter of the house to this Mobei for him to attempt deceit. Deign to listen. This day a week; was it not the day to a year of Lady Iwa's leaving the house in Yotsuya?"

Lady Iwa turned to him with a startled face.

He continued — "A week ago Mobei visited Yotsuya. He has many customers there, not too curious about prices. Hence he brings the best of his wares. Coming to the house in Samonchō a feast was in progress. There were present Itō Dono, Akiyama Sama, Natsumé and Imaizumi Sama, Kondō Dono; Lady Hana San, of course.

“All were exceedingly merry, Iémon Dono poured out a cup of wine. 'Mobei! Mobei! Come here! Drain this cup in honour of the occasion. We celebrate the anniversary of the expulsion of the incubus. The demon is driven forth from the Paradise of Yotsuya! Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō! Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō!'

“This Mobei was amazed — 'The incubus…. What incubus?'

“'Why: Lady Iwa San. A year since, with the aid of these good

friends, and one not present here, Iémon freed himself from the clutches of the vengeful apparition. Our Kumigashira granted divorce in due form.

“’This son of Takahashi Daihachirō — “Yanagibara Kazuma” — “Tamiya Iémon” no longer catches at sleep to wake in fear! Chief, deep is the gratitude of Iémon for the favour done by Itō Dono.'

“The daughter of the house an incubus! At these outrageous

words Mobei felt faint. Receiving the cup, as in modesty returned to the rōka to drink, the contents were spilled on the ground.

“Ah! Honoured lady, it is not only that the daughter of the house has been driven out. Her goods have been cleverly stolen by false messages of gambling losses. Stored with Kondō Sama they were brought back on the success of the wicked plot!

“The whole is a conspiracy of Iémon Dono with Itō Dono, with Akiyama, Chōbei, Kondō, and others!

“They bragged of it, and told the tale in full before this Mobei, laughing the while. Why, lady! On the word of Chōbei San the order of divorce was issued by Itō Dono. Within the month Lady Hana San left the shelter of the house of Kondō Sama to enter the Tamiya as bride. Deign to look: here is a jewelled

comb reserved by Iémon Sama as present for Lady Hana San his wife. Here is gift of Itō Dono to Myōzen Oshō for his efforts 'in the cause!'"

Lady Iwa stood as one frozen.

With Mobei's words the light was flooding into mind and soul.

Step by step she now followed clearly the stages of this infamous conspiracy against her peace and honour. She had been fooled, cheated, degraded —

and by Itō Kwaiba, the enemy of Matazaémon; by Iémon, son of the hereditary foe Takahashi Daihachirō.

Mobei remained huddled at her feet, watching with fright the sudden and awful change in her face.

The words came in a whisper. At first she brought out her speech with difficulty, then to rise to torrent force — "Cheated, gulled by the hereditary foe! And this Iwa lies bound and

helpless! 'Tis understood! The end is at hand — Ah! The poison! The poison! Now it, too, rises; flowing upward to heart and head of Iwa. Accursed man! Accursed woman; who would play the rival and destroy the wife! The time is short; the crisis is at hand. Chōbei's dark words become light. Hana would poison Iwa through this treacherous leech. Iémon would kill her by the foul life of this brothel — !

“Gods of Nippon! Buddhas of the Universe! All powerful Amida, the Protector! Kwannon, the Lady Merciful! Deign to hearken to the prayer of this Iwa! Emma Dai-ō, king of Hell, summon not the daughter of Tamiya before the dreaded throne for judgment — through the course of seven existences — until the vengeance of Iwa be sated with the miserable end of these her persecutors!

“May the sacred characters of the Daimoku, written on the

heart of Iwa for her future salvation, be seared out as with hot iron! On Itō Kwaiba, Iémon, Akiyama Chōzaémon, Chōbei, all and every one engaged in this vile plot, rests the death curse of Iwa! Against these; against Natsumé, Imaizumi, Yoémon of Tamiya, lies the grudge of Iwa of Tamiya! Gods and Buddhas — grant this prayer!"

A violent hand was laid on the bosom of Mobei's robe. He

screamed in terror at the fearful face bent over him.

A broad round dead white swollen face, too sharp gleaming malignant dots darting flashes as from a sword between the puffed and swollen lids, froze him into a passive object.

One of these lids drooped horribly down upon the cheek of the apparition. In the physical effort exerted, the slit of the mouth showed the broad black

even teeth, which seemed about to clutch at his throat; as did the vigorous hand, the nails of which sank into his gullet.

Framed in the mass of wild disordered hair Mobei was isolated as in a universe of space; left alone with this fearful vision.

"Lady! Lady Iwa! Lady of Tamiya! This Mobei has done naught. Others have wronged Lady Iwa San. Mobei is guiltless.... Ah! Ah!"

With fright and pain he rolled over on the ground in a dead faint.

Screaming and shouting the women Také and Kōta rushed around and out to his rescue.

Lady Iwa San was now under the full control of her epileptic disorder.

Takézo staggered back, her hands to her face to hide the horrible sight, to wipe from eyes and cheeks the blood streaming

from the deep tears made by Lady Iwa's nails.

Kōta from behind seized Lady Iwa around the waist and shoulders. Sharply up came the elbow shot, catching this interloper under the chin.

Neck and jaw fairly cracked under the well-delivered blow. Kōta went down in a heap as one dead.

A servant coming along the North Warigesui had reached the crossing.

He thought it better to stand aside, rather than attempt to stop this seizing figure tearing through space.

At the canal bank there was a moment's pause. Then came a dull splash; as of some heavy body plunged in the water.

With a cry the man hastened forward.

Not a sign of anything could be seen. In this rural place no help was to be had, and he was little inclined to plunge at random into the foul stream.

In haste he turned back to where a crowd was gathering around the prostrate Mobei, the groaning harlots to whom pain had been meted out.

CHAPTER 15: CHŌBEI GETS THE NEWS

The servant stood over the accessory dealer now coming out of his half-trance condition.

The eyes of the two men met and showed mutual astonishment. "I understand Mobei San! In a quarrel over his wares with the vile women of this district?"

"Kakusuké San! Ah! There is much to tell. Lady Iwa San...."

The servant of Itō Kwaiba was amazed attention.

"This Mobei to his ill fortune, met with the lady of Tamiya. Her condition, her ignorance, was too pitiful. Learning all the truth from Mobei she seized and inflicted on him this punishment. May it cease there! Namu Amida Butsu! Namu Amida Butsu!... Heavy the grudge against your master Itō Dono; against Iémon Sama, his wife Lady Hana San, all in the

plot against the Lady Iwa. 'To seven existences grant this Iwa opportunity to vent her anger. Every one of the perpetrators of this deed shall be seized and put to death.'

“She invoked all the gods and Buddhas; Nay, the king of Hell — Emma Dai-ō himself. Look to yourself, Kakusuké San. Deign to seek employment elsewhere."

Kakusuké completed his task of raising the battered and scratched jewelry dealer to his

feet. "Mobei San, you have acted the fool; without doubt. Relate what has happened."

Mobei did so in full detail.

Kakusuké was thoughtful. "Much of this Kakusuké hears for the first time. A servant gets but snatches of the inside of such matters. Just now the mission has been from his master, Itō Dono, to the Inagaki yashiki near Hōonji; matter of transfer involved in the late adoption of Kibei Dono into the

House of the Danna Sama.... So that scoundrel Chōbei sold the lady of Tamiya to Toémon for a harlot. Alas! She deserved a better fate. One way or another they would kill her; and Chōbei, his money in hand, abetted the crime. Where is this brothel?"

Surrounded by his women Toémon was listening to their excited statements. Takézo was crying with rage and pain, as she examined her fissured countenance before a mirror.

Kōta, brought back to consciousness, lay groaning in a corner. They were applying cold compresses to her broken jaw.

Toémon looked up suspiciously as Kakusuké entered, supporting the lamed and maimed Mobei.

Said Kakusuké — "Look to this man's wares, scattered in the roadway; and to the man himself." He spoke roughly, and with authority.

Toémon did not dare to resent his manner. With well feigned solicitude he addressed Mobei — "Ma! Ma! A terrible injury. Your face has the blush of the plum blossom marked upon it.... Lady Haru, run to the house of Wakiyama Sensei. Kōta is badly hurt; his skill is needed. Stop at the drug store. Here is the coin to bring salve for this good man's wounds. Alas! That a woman of Toémon's house should so maltreat others. When caught her punishment...."

"Shut up!" said Kakusuké. He had already taken his line of conduct in his master's interest. "How comes it that the Lady Iwa is found at the house of Toémon?"

"The Lady Iwa!" replied the brothel keeper in well-feigned surprise. Turning to Mobei — "It is true, then, what the women report; that Mobei San called the Lady Iwa of this house 'Shinzō.' Who is this Lady Iwa?"

Said Kakusuké coldly — "The Lady Iwa is the granddaughter and heir of Tamiya Matazaémon, a higher dōshin. She is the wife of the go-kenin, Tamiya Iémon."

Toémon now was truly aghast. "Heir and wife of go-kenin! This Toémon had not the slightest inkling of her status. Chōbei has juggled this Toémon most outrageously."

He turned savagely on Lady Matsu. "So much for stupid brutality. One must give you

reign, or have no peace. Why not treat the woman kindly, learn her story? Lies or truth that of all the women in the house is known. But Lady Iwa San was a mark for malice. Chōbei has lied. Between you the house is ruined. Since when were samurai wives sold to life service? Fool! It means imprisonment, exile, to those implicated! This Toémon ends his days among the savage fishermen of Sado!"

He would have struck her. Kakusuké and the bantō interposed.

The woman did not budge. Defiant, she stood with folded arms — "It was Toémon's arrangement to buy her in blind belief of Chōbei. Why blame this Matsu? Since when were women exempt from service or punishment? The rule of the house is one or the other. How long has it been since Lady Seki left the house — in a box; and

Toémon had to make answer at the office?"

Then catching herself up in the presence of strangers — "Danna Sama, this is no time for a quarrel. Those of the house will say nothing; in their own interest. As for this worthy gentleman, the Lady Iwa was wife and heir neither of himself nor his master. Toémon San is grossly neglectful of courtesy due to guests. Leave Mobei San

to this Matsu." She whispered in his ear.

Toémon had now recovered his balance.

Kakusuké was a servant. He had an object in coming to Toémon's house, instead of making report at once to his master, to the outraged Iémon Dono.

Of course Toémon misinterepreted this motive; and Kakusuké was quite ready to profit by his mistake. To the

now courteous brothel keeper he was equally cordial.

Lady Matsu and her women carried off Mobei, to salve his wounds, ply him with fish and wine and good treatment, carefully to make inventory of his goods, and repack them with, with many a purchases.

What more could Mobei ask. His valued rosary, the necklace, the kanzashi, all the treasures were uninjured.

His coin purse was palpably swollen, and more pleasingly than his face. His beating had turned out a good day's venture; and without misgiving he could be left in the careful hands of Lady Matsu and her women.

Meanwhile Kakusuké and Toémon sat over their wine. From the servant and jewelry dealer the latter secured a complete view of his situation.

It was bad, but not irreparable. As Kakusuké with due tardiness

prepared to depart, the hospitable innkeeper had ample time to prostrate himself in salutation, meanwhile pushing over a golden ryō wrapped up in decently thin paper which permitted the filtering through of its yellow gleam.

Beseeched Toémon — "Great has been the trouble and delay of Kakusuké San. Mark not this day in memory, good Sir."

Kakusuké was equally polite in salutation — "Fear enters:

thanks for the kind entertainment of Toémon San. This alone is to be kept in mind, mark of a day otherwise of but little import."

These last words were a healing balm; and Toémon rejoiced.

With the departure of Kakusuké, the keeper of the night-hawks turned at once to his aides. "Také! Haru!... Ah! Kōta is completely done up. You, Také, bear the marks of the day's encounter. Go to Asakusa

Hanagawadō. Chōbei is to be brought here at once. The house must clear its skirts of this affair. If he refuses to come, put a rope about his neck and drag him here."

The women bowed. At once they prepared for the street, a mission welcome enough under other conditions.

Lady Také was smarting from her wounds and not very willing to be an object lesson. Lady Haru had in mind the fearful

curse of Lady Iwa, plainly heard by the women. Very willingly she would have had nothing to do with the affair.

Chōbei was engaged at Go with the metal dealer of his neighborhood.

The fish and wine were in course of preparation in the kitchen close by and under the skilled hands of Lady Taki.

The perfume, vinous and of viands, came to the noses of the

competitors, to the disturbance of their game.

Chōbei had just made a profitable stroke. He had five ryō in hand, commission from the worthy doguya for the successful sale of a daughter to the Yamadaya of Nakanochō.

This enterprising plebeian, having a son to succeed him in the business, had secured the necessary furnishing and adoption of a second son into the rival house of the

neighborhood, by means of the fifty ryō secured for the girl through the experience and clever tactics of Chōbei. Many the compliments and congratulations exchanged by these excellent men and worthy representatives of their class as they tussled over their game of Go. Profuse were the thanks of the metal dealer for past services and future feasting.

It was with some displeasure therefore that Lady Taki had her

offices interrupted to respond to a loud and harsh — "Request to make!" sounded at the house entrance.

Said she crossly — "Who is it?... Ah! Lady Také and Lady Haru San of Toémon Sama." Then in wonder — "Oh! Oh! Lady Také San.... Your honoured face.... Has Lady Také San gone to bed in the dark with the cat?"

Answered Lady Také, in no amiable mood — "It could well have been. Your man Chōbei

deals in such articles. There are the marks of Lady Iwa's nails. As for Chōbei, is the precious rascal at home?"

Lady Taki heard her with rising rage — "Lady Iwa? What has Chōbei San to do with any Lady Iwa and the house of Toémon San? Why call the man of Taki a scoundrel?"

"Because he is such. Nay, Lady, don't get angry." — Lady Haru was speaking — "has your husband a brother in

Abegawachō, a brother in need of twenty ryō and with a daughter who would do nothing but run after the men?"

Lady Taki was puzzled. "Chōbei San has no brother, in Abegawachō or any other chō. Hence such brother has no daughter Lady Iwa; nor are there children of his own, except the one born to him by this Taki, and a girl already sold...."

A light was breaking in on Lady Taki.

Months before she had come home to find that the daughter of the house had taken her departure.

Explained Chōbei — "At Yotsuya everything has been adjusted. Iémon Dono is established again with his wife. The lady will not come back to us. Deign to rejoice at the auspicious settlement of her affairs."

Which Lady Taki did; all the more as Chōbei often was in funds in the successive days through Tamiya.

Now she looked from one woman to the other, her fists clenched and working.

Said the harsh voice of Lady Také — "Chōbei lied then; just as the Danna Sama thought. Nearly a year ago he brought to the house the daughter of his brother Kanémon. He sold her into life service as a night-hawk.

For this she turned out to be worthless. Lady Taki San knows our Okamisan. No matter how severely beaten, even until the blood came, Lady Iwa would not consent to serve.

“Other means were tried, but the men of the house would have nothing to do with her. She was too ugly. Finally she was degraded into being the kitchen wench, to fetch and carry, and do the hardest and most nauseating tasks. At this

downfall in her prospects like a very fool she rejoiced.

“To-day she met the jewelry dealer Mobei. He recognized her as the Lady Iwa of Tamiya in the Yotsuya. Drawn apart they spoke together. Suddenly she seized and was like a demon. Leaping on Mobei she tore and clutched at him. Kōta and this Také ran to aid him. Kōta lies helpless and with a broken jaw. Truly it might have been the kick of a horse she received.

“This Také is — as can be seen. The Lady Iwa disappeared toward Warigesui canal. A servant saw her leap in. Probably she has killed herself....

“And now, Lady Taki San, is not your man Chōbei a scoundrel?"

Said Lady Taki — "Rightly spoken; more than right. Wait here."

Abruptly she entered the inner room. To Chōbei — "You ... my

fine fellow ... is this a time for Go? Up and off with you; to accompany Lady Také and Lady Haru from Toémon's in Honjō. A pretty business is in preparation there."

Said the embarrassed and enraged Chōbei — "Wh-what does this rude entrance of Taki mean? Is not the master of the metal shop present? Is such language, such abruptness, to be used in his presence?"

"The Danna of the doguya is certainly present," coolly replied the woman. "It would be better if he was at home....”

Turning she continued — “Honoured Sir, pray betake yourself there. This Chōbei has business with Toémon Sama of Honjō, the brothel keeper and chief of the night-hawks, to whom he has sold for life service as a street harlot the Lady Iwa, wife of the go-kenin Iémon Dono and heir of Tamiya

Matazaémon the dōshin. A man can be too clever — as this Chōbei, who cheats his wife and all others. Do you be clever enough to take the hint and depart.... Off with you!"

The doguya had sat in silence. His eyes were popping out of his head in frightened amaze.

Chōbei bounded up in a rage — "You huzzy — shut up! Would you publish the affairs of this Chōbei to the world? Many a bridge is to be passed in the

course through this world; and none too sure the footing. Money must be had to live and enjoy life. The result, not the means, is the important factor in its acquisition. Such rudeness to a guest! Vile jade, Chōbei will....!"

Lady Také and Lady Haru had to interfere — "Fight it out later, Chōbei San. This quarrel is no concern of ours. The sooner the master is seen, the better for Chōbei San. His rage is great,

and mounting. You have the contract? With that, face the master; if you can."

"Just so! Just so! As for this wench — she shall have something to remember this Chōbei by...."

The worthy and trembling metal dealer took this remark as threat of renewed violence. "For the kind reception and entertainment: thanks. Jubei calls later."

Nimbly he was on his feet. Diving under the cloak into which Chōbei was struggling he bounced out the front, leaving Chōbei on the ground and floundering in the folds of his garments, from which issued most violent language.

For the first time that day Lady Také and Lady Haru had something to amuse them.

Lady Taki refusing, they assisted Chōbei to his feet and adjusted his robe. Then one on

each side of him they set out for Honjō Yoshidachō.

As parting salute to Lady Taki, Chōbei finished his sentence.... "Something to remember on Chōbei's return."

Her laugh in reply was so savage that the women turned to look at her. In fright they hastened off with their prize.

At Honjō the reception of Chōbei called forth the whole house. The pimp entered the

presence of Toémon with confident and jaunty air.

"He has the contract?" said Toémon to the woman.

Lady Haru indicated a sleeve.

The bantō and one of the employed men grasped the arms of Chōbei. The incriminating document was deftly removed by Lady Haru and passed over to Toémon. "Now the fellow can neither

produce it, nor play his tricks with it."

He looked it over carefully; then placed it with his own copy. Chōbei was too outraged and frightened to do more than squat and gasp as he looked around the circle of hostile faces.

Without cushion he sat on the bare mat, much as does a criminal at the white sand.

Said Toémon severely — "For once Chōbei has drunk hot water with this Toémon. Does he think to act thus with impunity. The younger sister of his brother Kanémon, 'a noted wench for the streets,' was brought here for life service; sold to Toémon for twenty ryō. Toémon does not intend that the price shall be too high for him. Chōbei cannot lie out of his own contract. Toémon has it in his hands. Chōbei has the twenty ryō. Toémon loses his money.

Well and good: Toémon clears himself from the affair. The responsibility lies wholly with Chōbei. Let him look to it."

Chōbei seized the moment when lack of breath in his anger halted the speech of Toémon.

He would have lied, but Toémon again broke in.

"Chōbei has no brother. Chōbei has no woman to dispose of on his own signature. The one he did have, the one he possesses,

Toémon knows where to find. Toémon had a woman Lady Iwa in his house. You sold the wife of a go-kenin, Iémon Dono of Yotsuya; a woman who was the heir of Tamiya Matazaémon the dōshin. The Lady Iwa is traced to the hands of Chōbei. Settle the matter with those in office — machibugyō, dōshin, yakunin — when the affair comes to light...."

"Easily," burst in Chōbei, once more himself. "Honoured chief,

matters do not call for such earnestness. All this is mere froth and fury. It is true that Chōbei has deceived the chief; but it was at the orders of those much higher. The lady of Tamiya was an obstacle. The sale was ordered by Iémon Dono himself; backed by Itō Kwaiba the head of the Yotsuya neighborhood."

"Chōbei, you lie," said Toémon. The words and advice of Kakusuké still rang in his ears. "Iémon Dono? Itō Dono? Who

else will Chōbei bring in as his bails? Such a man is not to be trusted. With this Toémon there is no more dealing. The guild is to be warned by a circular letter."

At this fearful threat all Chōbei's jauntiness left him. His livelihood, his existence, were at stake.

He prostrated himself before Toémon, dragging his body over the tatami to the low table at which was seated this autocrat

of the night-hawks, this receiver of the refuse and worn-out goods of his greater brothers in the trade.

Toémon harshly repulsed him with his foot.

Chōbei in despair turned to Lady Matsu — "Honoured lady the chief is unreasonably angry. There shall be no loss of money, no harm suffered by the affair. Deign to say a word for Chōbei."

"Since when has Matsu had aught to do with the affairs of the house? The women are her concern. She goes not outside her province."

The pimp sought the feet of Lady Také — "Condescend to plead for Chōbei. His fault is venial. When no injury results, pardon follows. This is to cut off the breath of Chōbei, of wife and child. Deign to intercede."

The injured street harlot laughed. Her cracked voice was

rough — "The commission of Chōbei San has no attractions. This Také has had enough to do with the matter. Truly Chōbei is a wicked fellow. Také would fare badly in such intercourse. Besides his company is too high flown. Officials! Samurai! Chōbei San seeks and will find promotion in the world. Lodgings are preparing for Chōbei Sama in public office — on the Ryōgokubashi; of such he is assured."

She drew away from him, harshly cackling.

Thus he crawled from one to the other.

It was "Chōbei Sama," "Chōbei Dono," in derision they would call him prince — "Chōbei Kō." All stuck out their tongues at him.

The young fellows of the house, several of them, stood round the entrance, ostensibly occupied, but with one eye on the scene.

As Chōbei sought the bantō's aid, the man raised a long lean leg and gave him a violent kick in the breast.

Strong hands seized him as he rolled over and over to the edge of the platform, to land in the arms of the enthusiastic young men, who made haste to unceremoniously show him the door.

The next moment, and Chōbei was picking himself up out of the mud and snow of the street.

The lattice of the house entrance closed noisily.

In his confusion of mind by force of habit Chōbei turned round and bowed with ceremony toward the place of his unceremonious exit — "The time is inopportune. Chōbei intrudes. He will call again."

The opening of the wicket gate, the peering, scowling face of the bantō recalled the past scene to mind.

With all the haste his tottering gait allowed Chōbei sprang off northward to the Adzumabashi and home.

As he sped, swaying along, his active mind was making calculations. "Ryōgokubashi, the last home of the outcast beggar — other than the river which flows beneath it!"

He shuddered at the prophecy. "Bah! One rascal loses; another gains. Toémon loses twenty ryō. From Iémon San ten ryō was

the commission. Itō Dono gave five ryō and asked no questions. The total to Chōbei sums up thirty-five ryō. For a year the affair of Lady Iwa has fattened Chōbei; with something still left."

His foot struck a stone in the roadway. He looked up and around to find himself before the Genkwōji.

About to enter on the maze of temple grounds and yashiki separating him from the bridge

his gaze fell on the stagnant squalid waters of the canal. It was in the dirty foulness of this North Warigesui that Lady Iwa had disappeared.

Chōbei pulled up short. A dead cur, copper hued, with swollen germinating sides and grinning teeth, bobbed at him from the green slime.

Chōbei slewed round — "A vile ending; but after all an ending. Iémon profits; Chōbei gets the scoldings. Ah! If it was not that

Itō Kwaiba is engaged in this affair; Tamiya should pay dearly. There is a double ration to share with Chōbei — and not to be touched! Itō Dono is no man to trifle with. There was that affair with Isuké; and now, as he says, Iémon is a very son to him."

A memory seemed to touch Chōbei. His pace became a crawl. "Why hasten? Chōbei rushes to the fiend — that demon wife Taki. Chōbei would rather face Lady Iwa than Taki

in a rage." He laughed — "The attenuated hands of a ghost and the thick fist of Taki, the choice is not uncertain. From the lady mild and merciful there is nothing to fear. Evidently she has settled matters once and for all in the Warigesui canal.

“But at the tenement — there it is another affair. This Chōbei will fortify himself against the shock. A drink; then another, and still more. The scoldings will fall on a blunted mind

wandering in some dreamland. Time will soothe her rage. To-morrow Chōbei wakes, to find the storm has passed and Taki his obedient serving wench."

Near the Adzumabashi, following his prescription against domestic enlivenment, he entered a grog shop; to turn his good coin into wine.

The quarter at Hanagawadō in Asakusa was in an uproar.

What had occurred was this — There was an old woman — "Baba" in the native parlance for Dame Gossip — a seller of the dried seaweed called nori, still called Asakusa nori, though even at that time gathered at Shinagawa, Omori, and more distant places.

This old trot had returned, to make her last sales to the excellent metal dealer who lived opposite her own home in the nagaya, in which she lived next

door to the Chōbei, husband and wife.

The tongue of the doguya was still in full swing of the recital, not only of his own experiences, but of the revelations of Lady Taki. He was only too willing for this twenty-first time to repeat the tale to the nori seller, his good neighbor.

The good wife and wives listened again with open mouths. The Baba was the most interested of them all. This

choice morsel of gossip was to be gathered at the primal source, from the lips of Lady Taki herself.

She was all sympathy in her curiosity — ranging in the two cases of Chōbei and wife on the one part, and the metal dealer and his insulted household on the other part. Away she stepped quickly from the assembly of neighborhood gossips.

At the door of Chōbei's quarters she stopped — "Wife of the house! Wife of the house!... Strange: is she not at home? Is she so angered that no answer is given? However, this Baba fears no one....It begins to rain.... Excuse me! Excuse me!" She passed the room entrance and went into the home.

Glancing into the kitchen — "Oh! Oh! The meal is burnt to a crisp. It has become a soppy, disgusting mass. Excuse me!

Excuse me! The rain falls, the roof window is open!" She put down her empty tubs in order to play the good neighbor.

The first thing was to close the window against the descending rain. Quickly and deftly she proceeded to wipe the moisture off the shining vessels, to put everything in order in Lady Taki's usually immaculate kitchen. Women of this class are finicky housekeepers in their own homes.

As the old wife became less engaged she began to hear strange sounds above.

Some one was in conversation — and yet it was a one-sided queer kind of talk. The voice was threatening and wheedling.

Then she heard a child cry. Surely Lady Taki was in the upper room; and thus neglectful of her lord and household.

The old Baba went to the foot of the ladder and listened. "Excuse

me! Excuse me!" No answer came, beyond the curious droning monotone above, varied by an occasional wailing cry of the child. It seemed to be in pain.

Resolute, the sturdy old Baba began to climb the steps. At the top she halted, to get breath and look into the room.

The sight she witnessed froze the old woman in horror to where she stood.

A woman was in the room. She knelt over the body of the child, which now and again writhed in the hard and cruel grasp.

The queer monotonous voice went on — "Ah! To think you might grow up like your father. The wicked, unprincipled man! To sell a daughter of the house for a street harlot, for her to spend her life in such vile servitude; she by whose kindness this household has lived. Many the visits in the past

two years paid these humble rooms by the lady of Tamiya. To all her neighbors Lady Taki has pointed out and bragged of the favour of the daughter of the house. The very clothing now on your wretched puny body came from her hands. While Chōbei spent his gains in drink and paid women, Taki was nourished by the rice from Tamiya. When Taki lay in death of this tiny body it was the daughter of the house who furnished aid, and saw that child and mother could live.

Alas! That you should grow up to be like this villainous man is not to be endured.... Ah! An idea! To crunch your throat, to secure revenge and peace, security against the future." The figure bent down low over the child.

Suddenly it gave a fearful scream, as does a child fallen into the fire.

The Baba, helpless, could only feebly murmur — "Excuse me! Excuse me! Lady Taki San!

What are you about? Control yourself."

She gave a frightened yowl as the creature began to spread far apart the child's limbs, and with quick rips of the sharp kitchen knife beside her dissevered and tore the little limbs from the quivering body.

At the cry the woman turned half around and looked toward her.

Jaws dripping red with blood, a broad white flat face with bulging brow, two tiny piercing dots flashing from amid the thick swollen eyelids, it was the face of Lady Iwa glowering at her.

The old woman’s scream resounded far and wide. In her terror she fell backward down the steep steps, to land below on head and buttocks.

Some neighbors, people passing, came rushing in. A

crowd began to gather. "Baba! Baba San! What is wrong?"

She could not speak; only point upward and shudder as does one with heavy chills. As they moved toward the stair a roar went up from the crowd in the street.

Lady Taki had appeared at the window, her face smeared with blood and almost unrecognizable. She waved a limb of the dismembered infant.

The crowd were frozen with horror.

As some shouted to those within to hasten the woman brandished the bloody knife. Thrusting it deep into her throat she ripped and tore at the handle, spattering the incautious below with the blood spurting from the wound. Then she fell backward into the room.

When the foremost to interfere rushed in they drew back in fear at what they saw. The child's

head was half knawed from the body; its limbs lay scattered to this place and that.

The body of Lady Taki lay where she had fallen. It was as if her head had been gnawed from the trunk, but the head itself was missing. Search as they would, it was not to be found.

Meanwhile the news of these happenings spread rapidly.

In the next block it was shouted that the wife of the pimp Chōbei

had gone mad and killed and eaten five children.

A block further the number had risen to twenty-five.

At the guardhouse of the Adzumabashi she had killed and gnawed a hundred adults.

These rumours were mingled with the strange tale of the old woman as to Lady Iwa San.

In time there were many who had witnessed the suicide of Lady Taki, who were ready to

swear they had seen the fearful lady of Tamiya.

Chōbei first learned of the affair by being dragged from the grog shop to the guardhouse of the Adzumabashi. Here he was put under arrest.

Distressed and discomforted he stood before the ruin in his home, under the eyes of his neighbors. These stood loyally by him. As happens in neighborhood affairs in Nippon the aspect of the affair not

immediately on the surface was slow to reach official ears.

Thus it was as to the Tamiya phase involved. Chōbei had suffered much, and was in to suffer more. His fellow wardsmen were silent as to all but the actual facts needed for interpretation. The marvellous only filters out slowly.

But they had their own way of dealing with him. The kenshi made his report.

Examinations, fines, bribes, the funeral costs, would eventually reduce Chōbei to his worst garment.

With this after some weeks he would be permitted to go free. The house owner had instantly turned him out. The wardsmen had at the same time expelled him. Enough of Kazaguruma Chōbei — for the present.

CHAPTER 16:NEWS REACHES KWAIBA

Kwaiba was hard at it, practising his favourite arts.

His saké cup stood before him, and from time to time he raised the bottle from the hot water, testing its temperature with skilled hand. He accompanied the action with a continual drone of a gidayu.

Kwaiba by no means confined the art of gidayu recitation to the heroic tales usually

therewith associated. His present effort was one of the suggestive and obscene ukarebushi, quite as frequent and as well received in the gidayu theme containing them.

Kibei listened and applauded, with cynical amusement at the depravity of the impotent old man. Kwaiba had found an excellent bottle companion, and renewed his own former days in the pleasure quarter, with the

fresher experiences retailed by Kibei.

Said Kwaiba — "All has gone well. For half the year Kibei has been the son of Kwaiba. He has brought luck into the house."

Kibei bowed respectfully.

Continued the old man — "Iémon with his harlot is fast destroying Tamiya by riot and drinking. Chōzaémon is a fish in the net. The debt of ten ryō has doubled into twenty ryō, which

at any cost he must repay. Kwaiba will make him cut belly if he don't. And Tamiya! Old Tamiya; Matazaémon! Lady Iwa is paying his debt to Kwaiba by becoming an outcast, perhaps a beggar somewhere on the highway. If she shows her face in the neighborhood, seeking coin to keep life in a wretched carcass, this Kwaiba will send her to the jail, to rot as vagrant. But what did become of her? Iémon has never spoken."

Kibei shrugged his shoulders. "A close mouthed fellow; too wise to talk of himself. He would but say that Chōbei took the affair in hand."

Kwaiba threw up his hands in horror and merriment. Said he — "'Tis rumoured the fellow is a pimp. But surely he could not dispose of Lady Iwa in his line. The very demons of the Hell of lust would refuse all intercourse with her."

Just then Kakusuké presented himself. "Report to make to the Go Inkyō Sama. Inagaki Dono sends his compliments to Itō Sama. The papers of transfer are these; by the hand of Kakusuké."

As he took the documents, said Kwaiba in answer to Kibei's inquiring look — "Your honoured parent has favoured this Kwaiba. The transfer is of farms in Kazusa for others in Shimosa. Thus all can be

brought under one hand. A single bailiff can manage the whole property in the two villages."

"But the office...," objected Kibei. He had the samurai instinct against the slightest taint of failure in obligation.

"Let Kibei San deign to follow in the footsteps of Kwaiba. The successor to the bailiff recently deceased is a child. Kwaiba is in no haste to provide a substitute pending majority. The right will

lapse, and at majority the boy can be found occupation elsewhere, to no small gain in the revenue. Out of sight, out of mind. Kwaiba's present manager is unsurpassed; so is the income he manages to gather."

He looked around in some surprise, seeing that Kakusuké still maintained his position, although dismissed.

Then noting him closely — "What has happened,

Kakusuké? Your colour is bad. Too cordial entertainment by the servant of Inagaki Dono? Or has Kakusuké seen a ghost?"

"Kakusuké has seen Lady Iwa San; of Tamiya. Rather would he have seen a ghost; if indeed it was not a demon he saw."

Kwaiba started — "Lady Iwa! Where?"

"It was at the brothel of Toémon, chief of the night-hawks, at Yoshidachō in Honjō.

Mobei the jeweler had suffered direfully at her hands. Meeting her unexpectedly, the fool let out all he knew of the happenings in the neighborhood. In a rage she flew on him. 'To seven lives a curse on Iémon Dono, on Akiyama Sama, on Kondō Sama.'"

He hesitated; then added — "on the Go Inkyō Sama. Then in a straight line she flew off toward the canal. Did she drown

herself? This Kakusuké could not ascertain. Going to the aid of Mobei, mauled and prostrate on the ground, the whole story was learned. Chōbei had sold her for life to Toémon, to serve as a night-hawk."

Itō Kwaiba sat straight up. His idle braggart words of a few moments before came home to him. In Kibei he found no encouragement. After all Kibei was a samurai; harsh, but with

the courage of his caste and profession.

He spoke openly — "It was an outrageous deed. To sell a samurai’s wife to such a life! It stinks. This comes of bringing in a low dog such as this Chōbei. Did Iémon know of his intention?"

He looked Kwaiba in the eye, but the latter met him squarely — "What Iémon knew or did not know, this Kwaiba knows not. But of this event he must know

— and at once. Kakusuké, go in all haste to the house of Tamiya Sama. Kwaiba would consult with him."

Kibei fidgetted and fumed. He walked up and down the room. Then abruptly — "Condescend to pardon the presence of Kibei. The honoured father having matters to discuss with the diviner — he finds no amusement in the counsellor."

As he was withdrawing Iémon entered.

Their greeting was cold to the extreme. Iémon knew that Kibei hated and despised him; as much as he, Iémon, hated and feared Kibei.

Kwaiba called sharply to his genial son — "Pray be within call, if needed."

He was glad to see the surly fellow's exit. In some things Kwaiba felt fear. The stiff courage of Kibei made him ashamed openly to air his weakness.

He broke the news at once to Iémon. "Kakusuké has seen Lady Iwa."

Iémon looked at him curiously. Was Kwaiba frightened? Said the one-time priest — "What of that? She lives in Edo. A meeting with her is quite likely; at least for a man of the grade of Kakusuké." He smiled grimly —

"But...," said Kwaiba. He plunged into the story of the servant in its full details.

Iémon listened carefully. "Ah! She is likely to come here."

"Come here!" bellowed Kwaiba.

"Just so," answered Iémon. "If she seeks vengeance on this Iémon, on Kwaiba, or the others, where else would she come than Yotsuya. We cannot run away."

Kwaiba gasped at his coolness — "And Iémon Dono, does he open Tamiya to the presence of its ex-lady and mistress?" —

"A beggar, an outcast, importuning Tamiya; the severed body will lie in the ditch, for the gatherers of offal to cast as food to the dogs on the moor. Fear enters, but — honoured chief, condescend to follow the example of Iémon."

The round eyes in the round face of Kwaiba stood out. He leaned over and touched Iémon's sleeve.

In astonishment Iémon noted the fright depicted in his face.

The blustering old man at bottom was an arrant coward. Two knaves should understand each other — as did he and Chōbei.

He felt that he had been gulled during the whole of his intercourse with this old fool. He should have bluffed; and not been bluffed.

Said Kwaiba in lowered voice — "Kakusuké could see nothing of her. She disappeared into the waters of Warigesui. Suppose

Lady Iwa appears as a ghost, to take vengeance on Kwaiba...."
He straightened up in astonishment and some anger at the derisive smile playing over the face of Iémon.

Indeed Iémon was more than amused. Not at the circumstances, but at finding at last this weak spot in the man who had dominated him. Conditions, however, controlled him.

It was fact that the physical Lady Iwa might appear — to the distress and discomfiture of all concerned. They must stand together. He spoke with severity — "Rich and afraid of ghosts! Has not Itō Dono two spearmen when he goes abroad? When he has an interview with his lord does he tremble with fear? When the enemy in life, with all physical powers, is not feared; why fear a disembodied spirit deprived of all means of venting its wrath and spite? It is but the

imagination which works havoc. None are more helpless than the dead. With them time and occasion has reached an end. If Lady Iwa returns to Yotsuya, it will be in her own person. With Lady Iwa, the beggar and night-hawk, our Kumigashira knows how to deal."

"Then Iémon knew the lot dealt out to Lady Iwa."

"At first hand; from Chōbei himself. The lean knave has prospered by the affair. Iémon

had no such desire to see him, as to secure his costly presence at the dinner party so unfortunately witnessed by Mobei.... But deign to call for wine; drive out these vapours with wine. Honoured chief, condescend to play the host to Iémon."

Iémon's manner was not wholly natural, as Kwaiba could have detected if more himself. He felt immensely relieved. A priest — surely he was one to know all

about the nature of ghosts; was one to speak with authority.

Iémon was hardly to be regarded as in ecclesiastical good odour. But Kwaiba was easily satisfied. He, too, roared — "Wine! Wine! Bring wine!"

As by magic Kibei appeared at the welcome sound.

He disliked Iémon, but he liked wine. The servants bustled around. The wine was heated —

again and again. A feast of fish — with more wine — followed.

It was late when Iémon left the house, the only sober member of the party. Of his hosts, one was maudlin, the other asleep. The ample resources of Tamiya, if not of benefit to his person, in these past two years had given him the chance to harden his head; and he had grasped it.

Iémon by no means had all the confidence he displayed before Kwaiba.

He was a priest, but environment influences everybody. There was a possibility — discountenanced by experience, but existing.

As he walked slowly along Teramachi his thoughts strayed back into the past. "It was an ill bond between this Iémon and Lady Iwa San. Without question she has drowned herself in the Warigesui canal. The body must be found and buried. Memorial services are to be recited for

one dying without relatives or friends."

The virtuous resolution was the outcome of his meditation and glances into the many graveyards passed in his progress through the temple-lined street. It was a beautiful street, with its overhanging trees, its open spaces populated by the many dead, its temples gorgeous in red and gilding amid the dark green of pine and cedar.

Iémon on this night had to hasten his steps. Rain threatened. Gusts of wind came sharply from this side and that, driving the first drops of the coming storm. He reached home just as it broke with all its fury.

To Lady Hana he would say nothing of Kwaiba's mission.

On her remarking on the lateness of the hour, he made answer that the old man was out of sorts. Kibei was too robust a bottle companion for a

man reaching toward his seventieth year. No matter how vigorous, Kwaiba's wine was showing on him.

The two prepared for bed. Lady Hana listened as the rain dashed in streams against the amado, as if trying to break its way in. She gave a little chuckle — "Who would have thought it!"

"What?" asked Iémon, perhaps a little tartly. He was nervous.

Lady Hana laughed — "That Iémon and this Hana should be where they now are. Their parting was on a night like this. Ah! At seeing a man weep Hana could have retired into a cave — forever. Only the fortunate accident of a drunken yakunin as guest enabled her to give warning.... And now! Once more united Iémon and this Hana live in luxury. Every wish is gratified. Thanks for the past which contained this meeting in its womb; thanks for the present

in which happiness is secured: 'Losing one's way, again roads meet! The hill of flowers.'"

A terrific gust struck the rain-doors. They bent and cracked before the force of the gale. The vivid white of lightning showed that one door had been forced from its groove.

Iémon rose and replaced it. As he turned away suddenly the room was plunged in darkness.

Said the voice of Lady Hana — "The light of the lamp has gone out. Oh! Oh! The lights in the altar are lit. And yet this Hana extinguished them!"

Grumbled Iémon — "The wind has blown out the light in the lamp. Doubtless a spark was left in the wick of the altar light. Fire is to be dreaded; great care should be taken in extinguishing the light."

As he relit the light in the night lamp, Lady Hana went up to the

altar to extinguish the lights there. She put her hand out to take one.

A sharp scream, and she fell back in confusion and fright. "A snake in the altar! Help! Aid this Hana!" As she fled the snake with a thud fell on the floor.

Unrolling its six feet of length, it started in pursuit. Iémon stepped behind it and caught it by the tail. A sharp rap behind

the snake’s head stunned it. It hung limp in his hand.

"Hana, please open the door."

"No, no: this Hana cannot; move she will not."

"Coward!" said Iémon. "Time comes when Hana, for generations in the future existence, will wander hill and dale in such form."

"Ara!" The woman was properly shocked at this speech, wicked and brutal as an imprecation.

"Has the life of Hana been so foul as to deserve such punishment in a future life? Surely 'tis not the priest of Reigan who speaks; nor Iémon."

She could only see his lips move as he stood at the door. "Evil was the connection between Lady Iwa and this Iémon. Wander not as one unburied, but becoming a Buddha at once enter Nirvana. Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō! Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō! Wonderful the Law,

wondrous the Scripture of the Lotus!" With the invocation he cast the stunned snake far out into the garden.

Returning, he said — "The rat snake is the most harmless of snakes. The farmers keep it to destroy the vermin which infest house and store rooms. How can Hana be afraid of snakes, living in this yashiki overgrown by weeds and grass, from roof to garden?"

Lady Hana did not reply in direct terms — "It is evil fortune to take a snake in the hand."

"Never mind such talk. It is the priest who speaks. This Iémon knows all about snakes. Go to sleep."

She obeyed, knowing nothing about Lady Iwa and the events of the day; yet her slumber was broken and restless. By morning she was in a high fever.

CHAPTER 17: NEWS FROM KWAIBA

Kwaiba was reported as ill; very ill. His friends and dependents who had to pay visits of condolence, spoke of this illness with awe and terror.

To understand what follows something must be said of the past of this man.

The actor, drawing on the presumed knowledge of his audience as to the story in the gross, can pass this over with a

speech or two; a horror-struck gesture and allusion. Not so the kōdan writer, who perforce must lay before his reader all the minutiæ of the case.

Itō Kwaiba did not brag when he spoke of his beauty as a boy, his handsome figure as a young man. These had brought him wealth and position; gained, it was whispered, in vilest service to his lord.

In these days he had in his employ a servant named Isuké, or as some say Kohei.

Engaged before the mirror Kwaiba was applying the paint and powder which of late had become necessary adjuncts to fit him to appear before his lord.

A gesture of pain and discomfiture, and then Kwaiba turned irritably toward his satellite. "Isuké, you are a clever fellow. Kwaiba has needed no aids to his looks —

up to recent days. Now paint and powder, all the armoury of a woman, or paraphernalia of an actor, hardly avail to conceal the blotches which disfigure Kwaiba's face and body. The voice broken and husky, the lightning pains in limbs and joints, these violet patches — in such state it soon will be impossible to act as attendant on his lordship's household service, as kami-yakunin. What disorder eats into the life and happiness of Kwaiba?"

For a time Isuké made no answer, beyond a bow at his master's acknowledgment of his cleverness, and in which he heartily concurred.

He seemed engaged in a close contemplation of the end of his nose. "Hei! Hei!"

It was all that Kwaiba could get out of him for the moment.

Then noting the growing anger Isuké began with — "Condescend beforehand to

pardon this Isuké. Though the anger of the young lord is hard to bear, yet a faithful servitor should speak. Deign to step this way."

He conducted Kwaiba to one of those small retired rooms, opening on an inner garden and common to every properly built house of any size in Nippon.

He closed the few rain-doors, shutting out the light. Then fetching a piece of camphor, he set fire to it. When the thick

yellow light flared strongly he took up a hand-mirror and passed it to Kwaiba.

Kwaiba was frightened at what he saw. His face was dark as that of a peasant of Satsuma.

Said Isuké — "The darkness is shown up by the light of the burning camphor. The colour is due to the poison circulating between the body and the outer skin. The white sunlight does not show up this symptom. But there is another test."

Lighting a candle, he took a long steel kanzashi needle and heated it to redness. Holding the cold end by his head towel he grasped the arm of Kwaiba. The latter drew back, afraid.

"Nay, it will give no pain," said Isuké. He thrust the hot length of the needle several inches under the skin. As far as Kwaiba was concerned he might as well have thrust it into the straw matting at his feet.

Isuké withdrew the needle and carefully pressed the arm. A brownish liquor oozed out; not blood. "The Danna has a nose — as yet."

Kwaiba hastily applied his arm to that member. He turned his face to one side in disgust and horror — "Is this Kwaiba already dead and rotten? In such condition all is lost. Duty no longer can be performed. Service and income cease together. Isuké, there remains

naught but to get out the mats. Kwaiba will cut belly."

Isuké examined him carefully and quizzically. Satisfied with his inspection, he said — "Deign to have confidence in Isuké. In former days he was not Isuké the servant. Son of a doctor of the Dutch practice at Nagasaki; gambling, wine, women have reduced Isuké to the state of a servant. Family and friends long since have discarded and cast him out. The severance of

relations between parent and child was formal. Isuké owes naught of service or duty to any but his master Kwaiba. Here is his refuge.

“Deign to give Isuké three silver ryō. The disease is curable. Trust the matter to Isuké. Mercury duly applied will remove the poison, and with it all the disastrous symptoms. The two hundred and thirty tawara of income are enjoyed by the young lord. Service can be

performed; and Isuké preserves such a good master."

Flattered and frightened Kwaiba at once handed over the money.

Isuké disappeared to secure the drug necessary to the Dutch practice. Baths and potions, potions and baths, followed in due course.

The promises of Isuké were fulfilled. The fearful symptoms gradually were alleviated. In the

course of six months Kwaiba was himself again; his position was assured to him. He heaved double sighs — of relief from the nightmare which had pursued him; of anxiety at the nightmare substituted for it.

Kwaiba was a rake and a gambler. So was Isuké. The two hundred and thirty tawara of income was saved to Kwaiba — and Isuké.

Not long after the cure was thus assured Isuké disappeared.

Kwaiba sighed gently, with relief at the departure of one who knew too much of his affairs, and with a scared feeling on losing the only "doctor" in whom he had confidence.

"These fellows come and go, like leaves on a tree. Isuké has grown tired, and deserted. Some day he may return. This Kwaiba is a good master."

Isuké did return — in the form of a note from the Yoshiwara. Twenty ryō were needed to pay

his debts to pleasure and gambling.

Severely reprimanded, Isuké opened his eyes in astonishment. "Respectfully heard and understood: has the income been reduced? But that does not affect the share of Isuké. He keeps well within his limit."

This was the first intimation Kwaiba had of Isuké's views as to his rôle of physician. In those days the doctor usually had the

pleasure of performance, not of payment. Moreover with the great — like Kwaiba — performance was carried out at a distance; the pulse felt by the vibration of a string attached to the wrist, or at best by passing the hand under the coverlet.

For a time Kwaiba's strange medical attendant devoted himself to his more prosaic duties of servant.

Within ten days his master ransomed him from a resort in

Shinagawa; price, ten ryō. A few weeks later he was heard from at a gambler's resort in Shinjuku.

The note was peremptory — and for fifty ryō.

Kwaiba lost all patience. Moreover, just then he held office very favourable for bringing this matter to an issue. But he must have Isuké; and have him in Yotsuya.

As usual payment secured the presence of a repentant Isuké, full of promises of amendment.

Kwaiba smiled, used soft words; and shortly after Isuké was confined to the jail on a trumped up charge of theft from another servant.

Kwaiba, then acting as magistrate for the district, had full power. On notification he assured Isuké of a speedy release.

This the unhappy man secured through a poisoned meal, following a long fast. He died raving, and cursing his master. No one heard him but his two jailers, who considered him crazy — this man of bad record.

Years had passed, but Isuké merely lay dormant in the mind of Kwaiba.

Then came up the affair of Tamiya — the threatening curse of Lady Iwa San.

Iémon's counsel lasted but over night.

With soberness and morning Kwaiba straightway showed the results of wrecked nerves and distorted imagination. Sleepless nights he now visited on his friends by an increasing irritability.

The first few days of this state of Kwaiba were laughable. He spoke of Lady Iwa San; not freely, rather with reticence. He made his references as of

jesting expectation of her advent.

Then he passed to boisterous tricks; springing out on the maids from dark corners or the turns in the corridors.

Alarmed by these manifestations of the old man — not entirely strange, for he was a terror to the female element in his household — they soon noted that there was an unnatural wildness in his

amusement at their discomfiture.

Now he would talk of nothing but Lady Iwa. From this hysterical mirth he passed to an hysterical fear.

Afraid of visions of the Lady of Tamiya he stayed awake at night. To be alone appalled him. He would have others keep awake with him.

He was now at the gibbering stage. "Night in the house of

Kwaiba is to be turned into day. The day shall be the time for sleep. Lights! Lights! More lights!"

He sat surrounded by his household, until the white light of dawn filtered through the spaces above the rain-doors.

One of his women, her hair down for washing, met him unexpectedly in the corridor. With a howl of terror he started to flee. Then recognizing her, he

flew on her and beat her almost to a jelly in his insane rage.

People began to talk of the eccentricities of Itō Kwaiba — the honoured neighborhood head.

Barely three weeks after Iémon's visit a violent scene occurred in the mansion of the Kumigashira.

Shouts and screams, the smashing of screens and sounds

of a terrific struggle were heard in Kwaiba's room.

Kibei, who with the men preferred night for sleep, rushed in. He found the old man standing, stark naked and alone. His attendants had fled — all of them.

His pillow sword drawn, Kwaiba was dancing to this side and that. "Isuké! Lady Iwa! Pardon! This Kwaiba is a wicked fellow! Isuké was poisoned by Kwaiba. Lady Iwa San? Kwaiba sold her

for a street whore. For seven lives they pursue him. Ah! A merry chase! But Kwaiba deals not with night-hawks. His game is higher. Away with the huzzy!"

He had dropped his sword and grasped in both hands the flower vase standing in the alcove. He threw it.

Kibei dodged, and catching him by a wrestler's hold, threw him to the ground.

Kakusuké, just entering, was knocked flat by the heavy missile.

Groaning, he rose, and with other servants came to the aid of the young lord.

Kwaiba was overpowered and guarded during the remainder of the night.

With daylight he knew nothing of what had occurred; at least he made no reference to it, no response to the talk of others.

His fear was now full on him. He babbled of nothing but Isuké and Lady Iwa San.

Now he was incapacitated, downright ill. There was no more turning of day into night, and vice versa. He was in the hands of his nurses.

But to humour him Kibei marshalled the women. Their beds were made encircling that of Kwaiba in the midst. Kibei and Kakusuké were present.

Thus they lay in this room brilliant with its scores of lanterns, its wax lights blazing on the lamp-stands. At the sides and in each corner were placed the scrolls of the holy sutra.

Kwaiba in despair sought a sleep which would not favour him. "Some one walks in the corridor.... Namu Amida Butsu! Namu Amida Butsu!... Kibei! Kibei!"

The appeal to the man would bring quicker response than that to the Buddha.

Indeed there was a sound, as of hair rubbing across the paper screens, of some one or something trying to peer through the opaque material. There was a rattle and dash of rain. A gust swept through the corridor, the shōji slightly parted.

Kwaiba gave a shriek — "Lady Iwa! Lady Iwa San! Ah! The

bloated face, the drooping eyelid, the corpse taint in the air! It catches Kwaiba's throat! Lady Iwa the incubus would force away Kwaiba the living. Ha! Ha!"

A stronger gust, and the shōji dislodged from its groove whirled round and fell noisily into the room. Terror gave strength to the sick man.

Kwaiba sprang madly forward. It was horrible to see the ghastly renovation of this

tottering, wrinkled, emaciated man, who yet inspired the fear of a maniac's reckless strength.

The frightened women huddled and crouched in the now darkened room, lit but by a single lamp near the alcove. Was Kwaiba mad?

As the men fought over the ruins of the doors, in the darkness of the corridor, at first faint as a mist, then distinctly seen, the women were assured of the presence of Lady Iwa.

In long black robe, face wide and bloated, of a livid greenish tint, hair in wild disorder, bulging forehead, swollen eyeless lids, she stood over the struggling men.

Suddenly she thrust the severed head she carried into the face of Kwaiba, leering horribly at him the while.

With a yell he fell flat on his back. The other men saw nothing. The braver entered

with lights. They gathered round the fallen Kwaiba.

This scene was the crisis of his disorder.

The disease, once dormant, now fell on him suddenly and with full force.

Perhaps these mental symptoms were its first indication. More annoying to his comfort, ulcers broke out all over his body. The itching drove the man nearly frantic. His mad scratching

spread the sores. The boils developed. They ran with pus. So terrible was the stench that few would stay by him.

The women fled the room in terror, driven away by the running stream of physical corruption, the continual babble of lewdness from the corrupt mind.

He soon noted their absence. Kibei, attended by the sturdy and faithful Kakusuké, remained to nurse him.

Suddenly said Kwaiba — "Lady Hana, the harlot of Reigan; this Kwaiba would have talk and dalliance with her. Summon her hither. Let wine and the samisen be brought, a feast prepared. Lady Hana! Lady Hana!"

He raved so for the woman that Kibei thought her presence would quiet him. A request was sent to the house of Iémon.

Wishing her to know nothing of the affair of Lady Iwa, Iémon had kept silence. He would have

refused the mission — on the pretext of a quarrel with Kwaiba and Kibei.

Lady Hana showed herself unexpectedly obstinate. With a snarl she turned on him, glowering — "It is to the favour of Kwaiba Sama that Iémon owes this Hana. She has a duty to the past, as well as to the present!"

Iémon shrank back. He passed his hand across the eyes into which Lady Iwa had just looked.

He no longer opposed her going.

Lady Hana was still weak from repeated attacks of the fever which had visited her ever since the night Iémon had cast forth the harmless rat snake.

She said that the snake had bitten her. It was the poison, not fever, working in her.

Iémon had laughed at her proposal to try the exorcisms of the priest. Behind the irritation

aroused by his scepticism was that peculiar clinging of a woman to an old lover, to a man with whom she had been intimate.

In the heart of Lady Hana there still remained a strong leaning to the man who had removed her from the rapid and nauseating life of the Fukagawa brothel, which cast her into the arms of anyone who paid the price and raised his finger.

With time and the old conditions probably she would have been as unfaithful to Iémon as she had been to Kwaiba. The latter showing his desire, she would have answered his call.

Even before this disease-eaten, swollen mass of boils, she showed but temporary repugnance. Leaning over him, almost overcome by the stench, with endearing terms she strove to rouse him to consciousness and recognition of her. It

seemed fearful to have him die without the word of parting.

Kibei aided her by raising the old man.

The result was a horrible frightened stare in eyes made large by fever and delirium. Long he gazed at her.

Said the woman — "'Tis Hana; Hana once the intimate of Kwaiba. Deign to take courage. This is but a passing affliction.

With Hana as nurse recovery to health is assured."

She laid her hands on his shoulders. In so doing her hair, come loose, fell down around her wan face.

Kwaiba was as galvanized. With a howl the old man pushed her violently away.

"Scrawny wench! What impudence to show your face here! Ah! To the last moment, waking and in dreams, she

pursues this Kwaiba. I sold you. 'Tis true — I sold you for a night-hawk — to Toémon of Honjō. Does Kwaiba consort with wenches of such ilk?"

Raising his fist he dealt her blow after blow while Kibei fought to stop him, all the time shouting — "Lady Iwa! Lady Iwa! The incubus solicits Kwaiba. Broken loose from Hell and the waters of Warigesui she would force away Kwaiba. Help!

Help! Aid for Kwaiba! Away with the incubus!"

The old man again had broken into his mad fit.

The shouts of Kibei brought Kakusuké.

Kwaiba's hands were detached from the masses of Lady Hana's hair. The wounds on her face were not so deep as those inflicted on her mind.

At last the secret was out. In bare feet she fled along the

muddy street toward the Samonchō house.

It was true that the vileness of the disease, the vileness of Kwaiba's tongue, had driven the house women from attendance in the sick room to the remotest quarters of the home.

But there was a deterrent even to their now limited service. All said the place where Kwaiba lay was haunted.

Under press of necessity a maid had brought needed medicaments to the sick man's room. Putting down the light she carried on the rōka, she pushed open the shōji to enter the outer chamber. Her robe caught as she did so.

Turning to release it she gave a fearful shriek.

Standing in the corridor, at the open screen behind her, were two tall figures robed in black.

With dishevelled hair, broad white flat faces, bulging brows, eyelids swollen and sightless, yet they gazed through and through the onlooker and into the farther room.

One creature, even more hideous with drooping lid and baldness extending far back, half moved, half fell toward the frightened maid. The woman's screams now were mingled with wild laughter.

Kibei came rushing out, sword drawn, to find her in a fit of mad hysterics.

Catching the drift of her broken phrases he went out on the rōka. There was no one there.

Cloak and kimono, hung up there to dry, rustled and moved a little in the draft. Had these frightened the woman? Kakusuké carried her back to her companions.

Henceforth no one would enter that part of the building occupied by the sick man.

Kibei as son, Kakusuké the old and faithful attendant, were isolated in their nursing.

Kibei noted the sick man's face. "Father, why the forehead so wrinkled? Is pain descended?"

Said Kwaiba — "'Tis the rats; they gnaw and worry at Kwaiba."

"Rats?" replied Kibei in some astonishment. He looked around. The shōji were tight closed.

Kwaiba noted the inspection. He shook his head, and pointed to the rama-shōji, the ornamental open work near the ceiling. This could not be obviated.

The story goes, ‘The Aunt is old and deaf. She sleeps; while rats, attracted by the foul sores of the scrofulous child, enter and attack the infant in its cradle.

The child gets thinner and weaker every day; then dies. A terrible creature is the rat.’ So much for the opinion of Nippon.

Kibei had brought a mosquito net. Its edges were weighted down with heavy stones. Thus the watchers could not be taken by surprise. Under its protection the sick man was saved from annoyance.

Said Kibei — "This illness is most tedious. Could not Kibei go to the Yoshiwara for a space?

The letters of the Kashiku accumulate. Kibei has nothing to give, and has given no explanation for not giving. What thinks Kakusuké?"

Kakusuké was brave. Moreover he knew the young lord was brave.

The prospect, however, of facing his old master in a crazy fit — and perhaps Lady Iwa — had no attraction. He gave his advice — "The Go Inkyō Sama is in a very precarious state. He is now very

weak. The worst may happen at any moment. For the young lord to be taking his pleasure at the Yoshiwara would arouse criticism in the neighborhood; nay, even more than criticism. It would be held unfilial. Deign to reconsider the purpose."

Kibei looked sourly at the swollen corruption which represented Kwaiba — "How does he hold on! His strength must be great."

Kakusuké shrugged his shoulders — "The Go Inkyō Sama will not die easily. He has much to go through yet."

"In the name of all the kami and Buddhas, how has he come to such an end? He is a sight to inspire fear — in those who can feel such."

Replied Kakusuké with sly look — "The Go Inkyō Sama has lived high, and loved beyond measure. The young lord does well to reconsider his purpose."

The night was passing.

The two men, worn out by the continued watching and nursing, after vain struggle to keep awake had gone to sleep.

Kakusuké was in the room with Kwaiba.

In his slumber Kibei was back in the fencing room. The clash of the wooden swords, the cries of the contestants, rang clear in his ears.

He woke to find rain and storm shaking and tearing at the amado. But it was the shouts of Kakusuké, standing at the shōji, which had aroused him — "Danna Sama! Danna Sama! young lord! At once! At once! Deign to hasten!"

Kibei rushed into the next room.

In fright Kakusuké pointed to the mosquito net. A figure stood upright within it, swaying, gesticulating, struggling.

It was a figure all black and horrible. "Un! Un!" grunted Kwaiba. He was answered by a mincing, gnawing sound.

"Father! Have courage! Kibei is here." He rushed at the heavy stones, to toss them to one side and enter the net. The swaying figure within suddenly toppled over in a heap.

With his sword Kibei tore and severed the cording of the net. The black mass of rats scattered to the eight directions of space.

On approaching Kwaiba a terrible sight met the eye. Eyes, ears, nose, chin, toes and fingers had been torn and eaten off. The lips were gnawed away and exposed to view the grinning teeth.

A feeble groan — and Kwaiba had met his end.

Neither Kibei nor Kakusuké dared to touch the foul body. In their panic the two men looked in each other's faces. "Namu Amida Butsu! Holy the Lord

Buddha, Amida!" prayed Kibei, on his knees before the corpse.

"Namu Amida Butsu!" answered Kakusuké.

CHAPTER 18: IN THE SHADOW OF THE GO-INKYŌ

Said a neighbor next day, on meeting his fellow-gossip — "Ah! Is it Goémon San? It is said the Go Inkyō is to be congratulated."

Kamimura Goémon sniffed. He was a long man; with long face, long nose, long thin arms, long thin legs; a malicious man, who longed to give advice to his fellows which they much

disliked to hear, and liked to see them writhe under the infliction.

In fact this epitome of length rarely spoke in good faith or temper — "The Go Inkyō is to be congratulated? Escaping the troubles of this world, perhaps he has fallen into worse troubles in the next."

At this unorthodox reply Mizoguchi Hambei showed surprise.

Continued Goémon — "The Go Inkyō died a leper, eaten by the rats. Such an end hardly calls for congratulations."

Mizoguchi gasped, with round eyes and round face. "Extraordinary!"

"Not at all," replied Kamimura, complacently tapping the palm of one hand with the elongated fingers of the other. "The Go Inkyō drove out Lady Iwa San from Tamiya. He gave Lady Hana in her stead to Iémon as

wife. Hana the harlot! Cursed by Lady Iwa in dying, he has met this frightful end. Akiyama, Natsumé, Imaizumi will surely follow. As will all those involved in the affair."

"But is Lady Iwa San really the cause of the death? The Go Inkyō in life was not the most careful of men in conserving health." This was timidly interjected by a third party.

Kamimura suppressed him with a scowl — "Of course it is Lady

Iwa San. Has she not been seen? The women of the house answer for it. Only Kibei the sceptic, and Kakusuké who would face the devil in person, attempt to deny it." He threw up a hand. With unction — "Ah! It inspires fear. Small is the profit of wickedness and malice. He is a fool who indulges in either.... How cold it is for the time of year!"

Said the interloper — "But the congratulations have to be

rendered all the same. It will be necessary to attend the all-night watch. How vexatious! Perhaps Lady Iwa San will not appear. There is no getting out of it?"

"Certainly not," answered Kamimura. "The Go Inkyō was the head of the neighborhood association. Twelve neighbors have been invited to the watch. At dawn the body is to be prepared. A pleasant undertaking, if all that is said be true! The viands will be of the

best, the wine no worse and plentiful. None must fail to attend." He smacked his lips.

The others likewise, but much less heartily.

It was an unwilling band which crawled in laggard procession through rain and mud and the length of the Teramachi to Kwaiba's house.

A dōshin, the neighborhood chief, a rich man, the mansion displayed all its splendour. The

atmosphere, however, was oppressive.

Kibei greeted the guests with heartiness, and accepted their condolence and gifts with lavish thanks and the cheerful face of him that profiteth by the funeral.

Kakusuké was his main aid in connection with the Go Inkyō's last appearance.

Occasionally a timid white-faced woman was seen, but she would

flit away from the scene of these festivities, to seek the companionship of her panic-stricken fellows. Entering the funereal chamber the body was found, laid out and decently swathed so as to cover, as far as possible, the horrible nature of the death.

On a white wood stand was the ihai in white wood, a virtuous lie as to the qualities of the deceased. It ran — ‘Tentoku Gishin Jishō Daishi.’ Which can

be interpreted — "A man of brilliant virtues, virtuous heart, and benevolent temperament."

Screens, upside down, were placed at the head: "Alas! The screen: the carp descends the fall."

Akiyama, Natsumé, Imaizumi, were the last to appear. The former had been composing a violent quarrel between his two friends — the long and the fat.

Much recrimination had passed, and the usually peaceful Imaizumi was in a most violent and truculent humour.

He glared with hate on Natsumé, who now aided Akiyama in efforts to soothe his anger. On entering the assembly the looks of all were composed.

"A retribution for deeds in the past world. Old; but so vigorous! The offering is a mere trifle. This Kyuzō would burn a stick of incense."

Kibei extended his thanks and suppressed his smile as much as possible.

He was breathing with full lungs for the first time in weeks. The storm was over; happiness was ahead; the clouded sky was all serene. "Thanks are felt. This Kibei is most fortunate: nay, grateful. Such kindness is not to be forgotten during life."

"The Inkyō an honored departed; Iémon Dono and Lady Hana are the husband and wife

not present?" The question came from some one in the room.

"Lady Hana San is very ill. Her state is serious. Iémon does not leave her." Akiyama answered for the truant pair.

Kibei's joy was complete.

Akiyama, Natsumé, Imaizumi were standing by Kwaiba's body. Kamimura slowly approached.

The long man's face was longer than ever; longer, much longer

than that of Natsumé; and Kibei was not in the running.

Goémon meditatively fondled his nose; on the pretence of concentrating thought, and for the purpose of relieving that member from the stench arising from Kwaiba's bier. This was no bed of roses.

"Yes, the Inkyō is indeed dead." He sniffed. "Soon it will be the turn of all of you — to be like this;" another sniff — "of Iémon

and Lady Hana, of Natsumé and Imaizumi, of this Akiyama San."

The latter gave a violent start. With hand to his nose also, he turned on the intruder.

Continued Goémon — "A plot was concocted against Lady Iwa San. Beggared and driven from the neighborhood, deceived and sold as a street harlot, this death of the Inkyō is but the first in the roll of her vengeance. Kamimura speaks with pure heart and without

malice. You men are not long for this world. Is Akiyama San reconciled? And...."

He pointed a skinny finger at Kyuzō, then at Jinzaémon. "You show it. Your eyes are hollow; your nostrils are fallen in. The colour of the face is livid. You seem already to be departed dead, prepared to lie with the Go Inkyō."

Akiyama found his tongue. He burst out in a rage — "The jest is unseemly. Kamimura San

goes too far. It is true this Chōzaémon gave counsel to Itō Kwaiba. Kyuzō and Jinzaémon took some part in what followed. But we acted on the orders of Itō Dono, of Iémon San. On the first will be visited any grudge."

Goémon laughed harshly. He pointed to the corpse. "Here he lies. How did he die? Goémon does not jest, and the argument of Akiyama San is rotten. The master bids the servants to beat

the snow from the bushes. The snow falls on them; not on him. How now Akiyama San?"

Chōzaémon turned away discomfited. All three felt very bad — in mind and body.

The bell of Sainenji struck 1am. Just opposite, its clangour filled the whole mansion with a ghostly sound.

In the depths of night this inert mass of metal seemed a thing of life, casting its influence into

the lives of those present, rousing them to face grave issues.

Noting the absence of Natsumé, the round-faced, round-eyed, round-bodied Imaizumi followed after.

Kibei came forth from the supper room, to find his guests all flown. "Where have they gone to, Kakusuké?" He looked around in amazement.

"They were taken with pains in the belly. With this excuse they departed. Yotsuya is afflicted with a flux." The servant answered in the dry and certain tone of one unconvinced.

Kibei shrugged his shoulders. "There is naught wrong with wine or viands?" —

"Nor with the guests," replied Kakusuké. "They are cowards, who have caught some inkling as to the not over-nice death of the Go Inkyō."

"The latter day samurai are not what the samurai were of old; at least this brand of them. Ah! These wretched little bureaucrats; samurai of the pen. Two men to eat a supper prepared for twelve sturdy trenchers. Well: two are enough to wash the corpse. Lend a hand Kakusuké."

"Respectfully heard and obeyed," replied the servant.

The white dress for the last cover to the body was laid

ready. Secured by Kwaiba many years before in a pilgrimage to the holy Kōyasan, the sacred characters were woven into its tissue.

Kakusuké dragged a large tub into the bathroom. Kwaiba's body was unswathed and placed in it.

Kakusuké eyed his late master with critical and unfavourable eye. "Now I see! The Go Inkyō is a strange object. No eyes: nose, ears, lips gone; his expression is

not a pleasant one....” When Kibei began to improperly apply the water — Nay! The young lord is awkward. Throw the water from head to feet.... Take care! Don't throw it over Kakusuké. He at least is yet alive. The young lord is wasteful. More is needed. Deign to wait a moment. Kakusuké draws it from the well."

He opened the side door and went outside.

Kibei drew a little apart from the body. It stank. A noise at the sliding window in the roof made him look up.

Oh! Oh! The face of Lady Iwa filled the aperture — round, white, flat; with puffed eyelids and a sightless glare. With a cry of horror and surprise Kibei sprang to the door.

As he did so slender attenuated hands groped downward.

"Kakusuké! Kakusuké!" He screamed.

"What is it, young lord?"

"Lady Iwa: she looks down through the hikimado! She seeks the Inkyō!"

Kakusuké pushed in, gave a look upward — "Bah! It's the cat. Is the young lord, too, getting nerves? They are a poor investment."

"The cat!" Kibei looked again.

Perched on the edge of the skylight was a street cat such as he had seen about in the neighborhood. Its face was white as the moon, the rest of its body dark and now visible against a cloud passing by.

Kibei sighed with relief. Nevertheless he kept his hand on his sword.

He turned round — to give a shout of surprise — "Kakusuké! Kakusuké! The body of the Go Inkyō is no longer here." As the

astonished servant came running to look into the empty tub, both men nearly fell over in their wonder.

The body of the Inkyō was whirling around the neighboring room in execution of a mad dance.

Followed by Kakusuké, his worthy son and heir sprang in pursuit. Invisible hands led Kwaiba and the pursuers into the darkness of the garden, into the rain and storm.

Kibei heard the steps just in front of him. He pursued madly after them.

‘To lose his parent's body, this was against all rules of samurai.’ — Thus comments the scribe of Nippon.

Kibei could commit all the moral and physical atrocities except — failure in filial conduct to parent and lord; the unpardonable sins of the Scripture of samurai.

Kakusuké soon lost his master in the darkness. Disconcerted and anxious he returned to secure a lantern. The wind promptly blew it out; then another, and a third.

He stood on the porch in the darkness to wait the return of the young lord.

For the first time Kakusuké had noted failing purpose in his young master. He was more concerned over this than over the strange disappearance of

the Inkyō's body. Was the young lord losing his nerve; as had the Lady Dono?

In time Kibei reappeared.

To Kakusuké's inquiring glance — "Kibei pursued to Myōgyōji; then up the hill. Here sight was lost of the Inkyō. The darkness prevented further search. A lantern is next to worthless in this gale. Kakusuké, go to the houses of Natsumé and Imaizumi close by. They are

young and will aid Kibei in the search."

Kakusuké did not demur. Pulling his cape over his head, off he posted.

He asked but to come across the Inkyō's body, in Lady Iwa's company or not made no difference to this iron-hearted servitor.

His mission was fruitless. The two men had expressed the intention of spending the night

at the Kwaiba wake. Neither had as yet returned.

Grumbled Kibei — "The filthy fellows! With this excuse to their wives they seek new pastures at Nakachō, to spend the night in dissipation. 'Tis Natsumé who is the lecher. Gladly would he wean Imaizumi from his barely wed wife."

"Or wean the wife from Imaizumi Sama! young lord, nothing can be done now. The dawn should be awaited." With

these sage comments the servant squatted at respectful distance from his master.

From time to time one or other arose, to look sceptically into the empty tub in which once had reposed the Inkyō's body.

Finally both nodded off into sleep. At dawn — don, don, don, don, came a loud knocking on the outer gate.

Kakusuké went out, to return with astonished face and portentous news.

The dead bodies of Natsumé Kyuzō and Imaizumi Jinzaémon had been found at the foot of the baké-ichō, a huge tree close by the guardhouse. Finger tip to finger tip three men could not girdle this tree.

With the bodies of the men lay that of a woman. Two corpses, man and woman, were stark naked.

Kibei's presence, as the successor to Kwaiba's office, was required.

He prepared at once to start for the Okidō.

The tale was in time learned from the prolix Kamimura Goémon, who had witnessed part at least of the scene.

As he was knocking at his door on the Shinjuku road, having just returned late from the watch at Kwaiba's house, rapid

steps were heard in the street. A man, recognized as Kyuzō, passed, running at top speed. He dragged along by the hand a woman, the wife of Imaizumi. The two were nearly naked. Close in the rear pursued Imaizumi Jinzaémon, his drawn sword in his hand. They sped up the wide road.

Goémon stepped out, to follow at a distance this flight and pursuit. At the ichō tree the fugitives were overtaken. The

woman was the first to be cut down. Kyuzō turned to grapple with the assailant. Unarmed his fate soon overtook him. He fell severed from shoulder to pap. Having finished his victims Imaizumi seated himself at the foot of the tree, and cut open his belly.

"Long had such outcome been expected," intoned the long-nosed man. The case needed no explanation. Others echoed the opinion of Goémon, who was

merely many fathoms deeper in the scandal of the neighborhood than most of them.

It was agreed to hush the matter up.

Reporting his own experience, to the astonishment of his hearers, Kibei, accompanied by Kakusuké, started down Teramachi toward Samégabashi.

As they passed the Gwanshōji attention was drawn by a pack

of dogs, fighting and quarrelling in the temple cemetery. A white object lay in the midst. With a shout the men sprang in.

Tearing up a grave stick Kibei rushed into the pack, driving off the animals. There lay the body of Itō Kwaiba, brought hither by the hands of Lady Iwa to be torn and mangled by the teeth of the brutes.

Thus was it that the funerals of Itō Kwaiba, Natsumé Kyuzō, and Imaizumi Jinzaémon took place

in one cortége on the same day and at the same time.

The postponement in the first instance — was it providential?

CHAPTER 19: TAMIYA YOÉMON: WITH NEWS OF KONDŌ ROKURŌBEI AND MYŌZEN THE PRIEST

Tamiya Yoémon was stumbling home in all haste from the funeral of Itō Kwaiba.

He was full of news for the wife, Lady Kamé. The neighbors

could talk of nothing but the strange happenings in the neighborhood, and details lost nothing in the telling; perhaps gained somewhat by the process.

Most edifying was the reported conduct of the wife of the late Natsumé Kyuzō, the observed of all observers at the funeral, the object of that solicitous congratulation which embodies the secret sigh of relief of friends, neighbors, and relatives

at the removal of a prospective burden.

Natsumé had left behind him a wife, an old mother, an infant child, and huge liabilities.

To administer this legacy — and perhaps to get rid of her mother-in-law — the wife had promptly and tearfully sacrificed her status, and sold herself for a term of years to the master of the Sagamiya, a pleasure house at Shinagawa post town.

The sum paid — one hundred ryō — relieved the immediate future. The neighbors derided the ignorance of the Sagamiya in accepting the uncertain bail of Akiyama Chōzaémon.

If the lady behaved badly, small satisfaction was to be obtained of her security. ‘Ignorance is bliss.’ Was said. Let the Sagamiya bask in both and the beauty of the prize.

Meanwhile their concern and admiration were for the lady

destined to this post town of the crowded Tōkaidō, the stopping place of high and low, noble and riff-raff, entering Edo town.

Of the inmates of the pleasure quarters, the harlots of Shinagawa, Shinjuku, Itabashi, were held in lowest esteem.

Arrived at his door Yoémon stopped short in surprise and alarm.

To his loud call of "Wife! Wife!" answer there was none. Looking

within he could barely distinguish objects through the thick smoke which filled the house.

The last thing the Nipponese would do under such conditions, would be to throw open doors and panels. This would convert the place at once to a blazing conflagration. Where was the fire getting its start?

Choking and spluttering Yoémon groped his way through the rooms into the rear. Wherever

the fire was, it was not in the living rooms. The smoke was accentuated on reaching the kitchen. Here was a smell of burning rice, of Yoémon's dinner gradually carbonizing under the influence of an element other than the juices of his round stomach.

Looking into the room, through the thickened haze he saw the flame of the fire brightening.

Lady Kamé the wife could be made out, on her knees before

the portable furnace. She was blowing a mass of slivers and brushwood into flame by the aid of a bamboo pipe.

It was this stuff, green and partly wet, which gave out the choking acrid smoke.

Yoémon was angered beyond measure at the sight of his ruined meal and expectations. "Kamé! Kamé! What are you doing? Have you gone mad? Ma! Ma! The dinner is being ruined. You are ill. Kamé's head

whirls with head-ache. Yoémon will act as cook. Go to bed — at once."

At his peremptory speech the wife looked up into the face of the husband standing over her. She scowled at him in a way to cause fear. "Not a shō of rice; not a mon. Yoémon would give freely to a beggar, rather than confer a copper on Iwa. Yoémon sells me as a street harlot."

He started back in fright before the snarling distorted visage.

The wife sprang to her feet. Pash! On his devoted head descended the hot iron pan with its content of stew.

He yelped, "Ah! Kamé is mad — clean daft!"

With a wild laugh she seized the pot full of boiling rice and began to pour it into the drain. When he tried to stop her, he received the mess full in his bosom — "Mad? Not at all. This Kamé never felt in better spirits. When grass grows in Samonchō

we enter Nirvana. Ha! Ha! Ha! To hasten the happy time!" With a kick she knocked over the furnace. In an instant the floor mat was in a blaze.

Yelling like mad, shouting for help, Yoémon leaped from the house. Lady Kamé seized the burning brands in her bare hands, hurling them into this room and into that.

Outstripping the old Yoémon, the younger men of the neighbors rushed in. The mad

woman was soon overcome and carried from the burning building.

Nothing else was saved. They took her to the house of Akiyama Chōzaémon. Here she was tied hand and foot, and put in a closet.

The old man Yoémon stood by in despair, watching the progress of events.

Before the conflagration was extinguished his own and four

other houses were destroyed. He was a ruined man; responsible for all.

Myōzen the priest had just set foot on the slope leading up from Samégabashi to Yotsuya.

A somewhat long retreat at Myōhonji, attendance at the ceremonies held on the Saint's birthday, had kept him in ignorance of recent events in Yotsuya.

In the dawn of the beautiful day of April 13th he had set out from Kamakura.

Sturdy as were the priest's limbs, yet he was a little tired. He rested at the foot of the hill.

Then his eyes grew big with astonishment.

In the waning afternoon a funeral came wending its way downwards. But such a funeral!

Two spearmen led the way. Then came a long train of attendants.

Three catafalques followed, the first a most imposing bier. Then came the relatives. Kibei on horseback headed these. The women rode in litter.

That it was a neighborhood funeral Myōzen had no doubt, both from its source and make up. He noted a parishioner in the cortége.

"Kamimura Uji!" The long-limbed, long-faced, long-tongued man left the ranks and

obsequiously greeted his spiritual father.

At Myōzen's question he expressed gratified surprise, and unlimbered his lingual member at once — "Whose honoured funeral this? Nay! It is a triple funeral; that of Natsumé Kyuzō, Imaizumi Jinzaémon, the Go Inkyō, our neighborhood-head. It is owing to this latter that there is such an outpouring of the neighborhood, with

attendance of barrier guards and firemen.

“Although the ending of Natsumé and Jinzaémon was not edifying, that of our honoured once head gratified still more the public curiosity. Gnawed and eaten by the rats he died most horribly."

He told of the eventful night. "Hence delay in the burial. The deaths of Natsumé and Imaizumi were almost coincident. The body of the

adulterous woman, rejected by both families, was cast out on the moor."

He noted with satisfaction the great impression his tale made on the priest, as also the clerical garb and rosary held in hand. "Pray join the band. A little re-adjustment...."

He bent down. With the baton he held in hand as leader of his section he carefully dusted the robes. Adjusting the folds he pronounced the results as most

presentable. "The honoured Oshō is ready to bury or be buried."

Myōzen took this remark in very ill form. He prepared to answer tartly, but curiosity overcame his weariness and ill temper. The procession was moving fast. He fell at once into line, with hardly an acknowledgment of Kamimura's courtesy, as this latter hastened forward to his place.

His neighbor in the procession explained.

The nature of the deaths of the three men had aroused the feeling in the neighborhood. Their connection with a conspiracy against Lady Iwa San was now generally known. Without doubt it was owing to her vengeance that they had died as they did. Let them lie outside the quarter.

The protest to Kibei was respectful but emphatic. A

newcomer, he had made no great resistance. It was determined to bury them at the Denzu-In, close by the mound of the nameless dead of Edo's great fire of more than half a century before. Hence the direction of the cortége.

As the cemetery of the great temple was approached the curiosity of Myōzen, morbidly growing the while, became overpowering. The priest slipped from rank to rank. At

the grave he stood in the very front. As long-time friend he besought a last glance at the dead.

Those given to Natsumé and Imaizumi called forth a careless prayer for each. The men hesitated before raising the cover concealing the body of Kwaiba. At Myōzen's peremptory gesture they complied. He bent over and looked in.

Frozen with horror, he was fascinated by those great holes for eyes, large as teacups, which seemed to fix him. Dead of leprosy, gnawed and torn by beasts, the face presented a sight unforgettable.

The holes torn in the flesh twisted the features into a lifelike, though ghastly, sardonic grin, full of the pains of the hell in which Kwaiba had suffered and now suffered.

A stench arose from the box which made the hardened bearers hold their noses and draw away. Yet the priest bent down all the closer. In his corruption the lips of the old man seemed to move. Did Kwaiba speak?

Closer and closer: Myōzen seemed never satisfied with this inspection.

The poise and brain gave way.

Priest and corpse met in the horrible salutation.

With exclamation the attendants sprang forward. Myōzen in a dead faint was carried apart and laid on the ground.

Some priests of the hall busied themselves over him. Somewhat revived he was taken off to the residence quarters of the temple, and soon was able to return to his home.

"Curious fool." Kibei was greatly angered. He was easily irritated in these days. The delay in the rites almost maddened him. Would old Kwaiba — his father Itō Inkyō — never be got out of men's sight? Out of Kibei's sight?

That night Myōzen sat alone in his quarters.

Somewhat shaken, he was ashamed and regretful at thought of his unseemly curiosity of the afternoon. The

priests of Denzuin had regarded him with covert amusement and repulsion. He had noted one passing the sleeve of his robe over his lips.

Myōzen explained the incident by more than usual weariness. They condoled with him, and made horrified gestures of ill-disguised glee when they thought his attention was elsewhere.

In his present privacy the scene at the grave came back to mind

again and again. "Ah! Ah! If this Myōzen had not looked. The Inkyō's face was terrible. Myōzen cannot put it from mind."

He glanced at the pages of the sutra lying before him. He turned them over. He knew they spoke of the horribleness of death; but what was the cold script to the actuality? It was no use, the attempt to read. Kwaiba's face interposed.

"Oh! That salute! The very idea of that terrible salute, the contact with corruption!" He was as if plunged in an icy bath.

He started nervously. It was but rain dashing against the amado, rattling and twisting in the gale. He could not sleep. That night he would watch.

The fire was hot in the brazier. He went to the closet to get some tea. On opening it he sprang back with a shout of alarm, to lean trembling and

quivering in every limb huddled against the wall. "Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō! Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō!"

One character of the wondrous formula secured pardon and safety to the believer in that paradise of Amida which Myōzen was in no great haste to visit.

Shivering as with a chill intently he watched the animal as it glided along the edge of the

room, to disappear into the shadows.

He shrugged his shoulders wearily. A rat had frightened him almost out of his wits! His heart beat tumultuously, almost to suffocation; then it seemed to cease altogether; to resume its wild career.

Hardly was he again seated, his hand on the kettle — don — don, don — don, don, don, don. Some one was violently knocking on the door.

Myōzen sprang up. Approaching the amado with silent step he eyed the bolts: All secure. Snatching up a stake close by he jammed it in between floor and crosspiece. Leaning heavily on the panel he listened.

"Myōzen Sama! Oshō Sama! Condescend to open; deign to give entrance! The storm nearly throws one to the ground. News! News for the Oshō! A request to make!"

Myōzen held his ground against this outer temptation. "Who are you, out at this hour of the night and in such weather? To-night Myōzen does not open. Go away; return in daylight."

"But the honoured Oshō Sama is needed. His presence is requested. Deign to open; at least to hear the message. The priest aids the afflicted."

There was something in the voice he recognized, despite its terror.

Regaining some courage he parleyed. The priest was for the consolation of the unfortunate. Lady Iwa had been — was — unfortunate. He could not open.

"Who are you? Unless the name be given this Myōzen holds no further talk. To-night he is unwell, positively ill. Come at dawn and Myōzen will receive you."

"Who? Does not the voice answer for the person? This is Tomobei, from the house of

Kondō Rokurōbei. Deign to open. The master needs and calls for the aid of the Oshō Sama."

Voice and speech, the importance of Kondō in the life of Myōzen, broke down his hesitation.

Slowly he removed the bars. Tomobei entered, dripping with wet. He cast down his straw coat at the entrance. The man's eyes and manner were wild. He kept casting frightened looks

into the wild welter of storm outside. When the priest would withdraw into the room he held him by the skirt.

"What has happened?" commanded Myōzen briefly.

Replied Tomobei — "A terrible thing! To-day the master was ready to attend the funeral of Itō Inkyō. The wife was engaged in putting the house kimono in the closet. Lady Tama was playing on the upper rōka. She is but seven years old. Leaning

far over to see her father leave, she lost her balance. Down she fell, to be impaled on the knife-like points of the shinobi-gaeshi. The sharp-pointed bamboo, protection against thieves, have robbed the Danna of his greatest treasure. Deep into throat and chest ran the cruel spikes, to appear through the back. The sight inspired fear, so horrible was it. He could but call out — 'Tomobei! Tomobei!'

“All effort to detach the child, to saw off the points, did but make matters worse. It was necessary to fetch a ladder. When taken down she was dead. Alas! Alas!
“The Okusama is nearly crazed. The Danna Sama in his cruel distress does but rage through the house. 'Myōzen Oshō, he loved the child. Let Myōzen Oshō be summoned to say a prayer of direction, while yet the child spirit hovers hereabouts.' Such is the cry of the Okusama. Hence the

presence of this Tomobei. Otherwise he would rather be scourged at the white sand than face the darkness in which Lady Iwa San wanders abroad."

Man and priest were weeping. The former in his fright and over the confusion and distress fallen on the household; the priest over the sudden and dreadful end of this child to whom the homeless one, the man devoted to the solitary life,

had taken an unbounded affection as of a father.

Great as was his terror, he forgot his own ills in the greater misfortune of the life-long friend. He remained bowed in prayer. "Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō! Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō! Oh! The wondrous law, the sutra of the Lotus!" He rose — "Myōzen comes."

As they struggled through the storm, Tomobei kept up a nonsensical, running talk, full of

the superstitious fear of the man of the lower classes. "Iya! The affair has been terrible, but misfortune is in the air.... What's that! Ah! Something passes by ... above. Lady Iwa! Lady Iwa!" He seized the priest's arm and clung to him in terror.

Myōzen's fears had all returned. He would have run away, but was too tightly held. "Where! Where!" He shrieked and whirled around toward

Samégabashi. Tomobei held on tenaciously to his skirts.

An object was bearing down on them in the dark. Close upon priest and man they jumped to one side.

A cold hand was laid on the neck of the cleric, who squawked with fear. A howl answered the howls and mad cries and blows of the two men, who now threw themselves flat on the ground to shut out sight of the apparition.

The beast sped down the hill. Discomfited, Myōzen disentangled himself from the embraces of a broken water spout, which descending from the roof under which he had taken shelter, was sending its cold stream down his neck.

Tomobei rose from the mud puddle in which he lay face downward. They gazed at each other. "A dog! A wandering cur!"

Myōzen eyed his once immaculate garments with disgust. How present himself in such a state! Tomobei read his thoughts and determined to keep a companion so hardly won. "There are present but the master and the Okusama, Tomobei, and Kiku; other company there is none.... Yes; the daughter of the house."

"The corpse needs no company," said Myōzen testily. In his disgrace and unkempt condition

Myōzen was unduly irritated at his child friend. The business was to be gone through.

They were opposite the cemetery of Sainenji, on its western side. Said Tomobei — "A paling is loose. There is no need to descend the hill. This is no cheerful spot at this hour. Deign to sprint it, Oshō Sama. In the time one can count ten the entrance at the rear is reached. Deign a spurt,

honoured priest; deign to sprint."

Myōzen felt he was in for everything this night. With Tomobei he tucked up his robes to his hams, as if entering a race.

Crawling through the bamboo palings into the haunt of the dead, at it they went — a mad sprint across to Kōndo's house. Tomobei was the more active. He turned to watch the priest tripping over hillocks in the

grass, knocking into gravestones hidden by the darkness. So near home, courage was returning.

He burst into laughter at sight of Myōzen madly hammering a battered old stone lantern of the yukimidōro style. The broad-brimmed hat-like object he belaboured as something naturally or unnaturally possessed of life, all the while giving utterance to anything but priestly language.

Tomobei ventured back to his rescue. Myōzen was quite battered and bleeding as the two rushed into Kondō's house.

The master was expecting them; but he threw up his hands as they appeared in the room. "Oshō Sama! Tomobei! What are you about! Why rush into the room, clogs still on the feet? Deign to withdraw. The mats are stained and streaked with mud.... Water for the feet of the Oshō Sama! Tomobei, are you

mad? Out with you: bring water to clean up this mess."

In confusion the priest withdrew. His apologies were profuse as he reappeared — "Alas! Terrible the loss, and in such dreadful manner. Kondō Dono, Okusama, part at least of this grief Myōzen would take on himself. Great is the sorrow at this end of one just beginning life."

The wife received the condolence of the priest with a

burst of weeping. Then she turned fiercely on the husband — "It is all the fault of Rokurōbei. He was marriage broker for Lady Iwa San in the marriage with Iémon. Turning against her, he took Lady Hana into the house. Did she not spend her time in idling, and teaching the child the ways of her questionable life — 'how to please men,' forsooth?... Ah! Tama did have pretty ways. Though but of seven years, she danced, and sang, and postured

as would a girl double her age. Now thus cruelly she has perished."

Her mind, reverted to the child, again took a turn. "The plot against Lady Iwa — with Itō Kwaiba, Iémon, Chōzaémon — here is found the source of this calamity. Lady Iwa in dying has cursed all involved. Now 'tis the turn of Kondō and his unfortunate wife." She ended in another outburst of tears, her

head on the mats at the feet of the priest.

Rokurōbei was tearing up and down the room, gesticulating and almost shouting — "Yes! 'Tis she! 'Tis she! The hateful Lady Iwa strikes the father through the child. Ah! It was a cowardly act to visit such a frightful ending on one budding into life. Lady Iwa seeks revenge. Lady Iwa is abroad; and yet this Kondō cannot meet with her."

Myōzen was almost deafened with his cries and noisy earnestness. Truly to bring peace into this household, with division reigning between husband and wife smitten with fear of the supernatural, would be no easy matter. His priestly experience taught him the safest way to bring about his object.

"'Tis true; 'tis true. But loud cries avail nothing. The aid of the Buddha for the deceased is

to be sought." Apologetically he showed something of his muddy condition to the wife.

At once she rose. Outergarments were removed. Muddied undergarments were renewed.

Myōzen went into the mortuary chamber. The little jewel was laid out as in sleep. The wounded chest, the torn throat, were concealed by garments and a scarf-like bandage adjusted by a mother's sad and

tender care. The incense sticks lay in clay saucers near the couch.

"Oh, the wonderful Law! The sutra of the Lotus! Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō! Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō!" He looked long at the little silent figure.

His eyes were full of tears as he turned and took the hands of the weeping mother who had followed him into the room. Then for long he spoke in consoling tones. She was

somewhat quieted when they returned.

Kondō Rokuōbei was still moving restlessly about the room. Now he was here, now there; from the death room he returned to the company; from them he passed to the kitchen.

The wife thought of the friend and priest. "Tomobei, go to the store-room and bring wine."

Myōzen was a curious mixture. His weak spot was touched —

"Deign it, honoured lady, for all. Let the occasion be made seemly, but more cheerful. Cause not sorrow to the dead by an unmeasured grief. This does but pain the Spirit in its forced communion with the living. Death perchance is not the misfortune of subsequent existence in this world, but a passage to the paradise of Amida."

He spoke unctuously; as one full informed and longing for its

trial. His homily had no effect in moving Tomobei, who was flatly unwilling to perform the service ordered.

"The wine...," broke in Kondō harshly, "The basement is at the end of the lot. The hour is very late, and the storm ... and other things ... it rages fiercely. This Tomobei...."

"Shut up!" roared his master, with easily roused anger.

The maid Lady Kiku timidly interposed — "There is a supply in the kitchen. This Kiku early brought it there, anticipating the need. Indeed the storm is terrible. One gets wet to the bone in traversing the yard."

The wife caught the last words — "Aye! Wet and chilled the lost child spirit wanders, ringing its bell and vainly seeking aid and shelter; no aid at hand but that of the heartless hag in the River of Souls." At the thought of the

little Lady Tama in cold and storm she broke down.

Crying bitterly, she crept from the room and laid down beside the bier.

The wine was served. Myōzen drank. Then he drank again. His potations gave him confidence — for more drink — and recalled him to his functions.

"Let us all pray. Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō! Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō! Wonderful the Law!

Wonderful the sutra of the Lotus, explanatory of the Law by which mankind are saved, to enter the paradise of Amida. Be sure the wanderings of Lady Tama will be short. Scanty is the power of the Shozuka no Baba. Soon shall the child sit upon a lotus. Early shall be her entrance into Nirvana. Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō! Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō!... Honoured master, let all join in. Command the servants to join in the recital of the Daimoku."

Kondō waved a hand at Tomobei and Lady Kiku, in assent and command.

Vigorous were the tones of all in the responses.

Myōzen drank again. He pressed the wine on the others; drinking in turn as they agreed. The night was passing. It was 1am.

Said he — "Don't get drowsy. By every means avoid it. Now! A vigorous prayer." He raised his

hand — "Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō! Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō!"

But the responses were flagging.

Said Myōzen — "This will never do; at this hour of the night." He drank again — to find that the supply had come to an end. Kondō was nodding. Tomobei, if awake, was deaf to words.

Myōzen rose himself to fetch a new supply.

Kondō pricked up his ears. The temple bells were booming the hour watch in solemn unison. The rain splashed and pattered on the amado.

A rustling, swishing sound was heard, close by, in the next room. Now it was as if a hand was passing along the screen.

He sprang up, drawn sword in hand. His eyes were riveted on the shōji, anticipating an appearance. Then he laid a

violent hand on the interposing obstacle and threw it back.

A tall figure robed in black, with broad flat face and bulging brow, puffed eyelids in which were sunken little dots in place of eyes, hair in wild disorder framing the dead white face, stood before him.

"Lady Iwa! Lady Iwa!" The lamp was knocked over, but not before he dealt the one fierce upward blow.

Madly he sprang on the apparition and slashed away in the dark. A cry rang loud.

Kondō danced with joy, calling loudly for lights. "Lady Iwa! Lady Iwa! Kondō has slain the incubus, the enemy of his child! Rejoice with Kondō! The vendetta is accomplished!"

In the darkness and confusion a groan was heard; then another, still fainter; then there was silence.

Tomobei appeared with a light. He leaned over the long black robed body; to raise an alarmed face to his joyful master. "At what does the Danna Sama rejoice? What has he done? 'Tis Myōzen Sama, the Oshō Sama, who lies cut down. Dreadful has been the mistake of the Danna Sama. This is like to cost the House dear."

"Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō! Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō!" The sword had slipped from Kondō's

hand, and in genuine grief he knelt beside the body of the unfortunate priest, seeking for some sign of life.

Alas! Myōzen had almost been cut in two by the upward sweep of the sword. From liver to pap was one gaping wound. He lay in the pool of almost all the blood in his body.

Gathered around the corpse the four people eyed each other with terror.

Don — don — don, don, don, don. They sprang up in a huddled mass. The sound was at their very shoulders. "Some one knocks at the back door," said Tomobei.

"Go open it," commanded Kondō.

Tomobei flatly refused, and without respect, nay with insolence.

Kondō picked up and weighed in his hand the bloody sword. Why

mingle vile blood with good? Instead of cutting the man down he went himself and opened the half door at the top.

A woman, dripping with water, her hair in wild disorder, her face white as chalk, stood outside in the storm. Kondō gave an exclamation of surprise — "Lady Kamé of Tamiya! How comes Lady Kamé here? It was said that Yoémon San had shut her up, as one gone mad."

The woman smirked with satisfied air — "Kondō Rokurōbei is seer as well as murderer. This Kamé was bound and imprisoned; nay, almost divorced. Myōzen, just dead at Kondō's hands, to-morrow was to pronounce the divorce. For so much, thanks to Kondō Dono. But Lady Tama has died. Kamé would condole with Kondō San; burn a stick of incense for Lady Tama. Condescend to grant entrance."

Said Rokurōbei abruptly — "How knows Lady Kamé of the death of Myōzen; who told her of the fate of Lady Tama?"

She laughed wildly — "Who? Lady Iwa; Lady Iwa is the friend of Kamé. It was she who loosed the bonds. 'Lady Tama of Kondō's house is dead. Lady Kamé should condole with the wife, the friend of this Iwa. Get you hence, for Kondō has murdered the priest.' ... So here

we are; Lady Iwa accompanies Kamé. Here she is."

She waved a hand into the storm and darkness. "Deign to give passage to the chamber where lies Lady Tama. Lady Iwa and Kamé would burn incense to the darling's memory, to the little Jewel." With a roar Kondō seized the breast of her robe — "Vile old trot, off with you!"

He gave her a violent push which sent her on her buttocks.

The woman remained seated in the mud, laughing noisily. She held out two skinny arms to him. With a slam he shut the door.

He knelt by the priest's body, truly grieved — "Ah! Lady Iwa is abroad. How has this mad woman knowledge of this deed? What was the offence of Myōzen thus to deserve the hatred of Tamiya Lady Iwa?"

Lady Kamé had seen the priest enter, had stood in the wet

listening to the wild talk of Kondō, had seen the bloody sword in his hand. Her mad brain had put riot and death together.

The talk as to Lady Tama she had overheard from her closet.

Kondō thought of neither explanation. He was at odds with Akiyama, and had sent no message to his house. As he speculated and thought how best to compound matters with the temple, now grieved at the

rash blow fallen on a friend, now aghast at the certain and heavy indemnification which would be exacted by the enraged clerics, an uproar arose outside.

There were wild cries and a scream of pain.

Then came a loud triumphant shout — "Heads out! Heads out! Lady Iwa is slain! This Akiyama has killed the incubus. The nightmare of the neighborhood is lifted. Help!"

Kondō sprang up and out of the house.

Were the words true? Had another succeeded where he had failed? His lantern, the lanterns of many others, threw light on the place where Akiyama Chōzaémon bravely stood over the prostrate body of the apparition.

Returning late from Shitamachi he had entered the neighborhood with shrinking terror.

As he skulked along, with eyes on every dark corner, the figure of a woman was seen close by the eaves of the house of Kondō Rokurōbei. As he approached she came forward laughing wildly the while.

The light of his lantern fell on the ghastly white face, the disordered hair. In a spasm of fright he dropped the lantern and delivered his blow in drawing the sword. The cut was

almost identical with the one delivered to Myōzen the priest.

The men there gathered looked into each other's faces, then at the body of Lady Kamé lying in their midst.

The crowd parted, and Tamiya Yoémon appeared. Kondō Rokurōbei and Akiyama Chōzaémon stood by with bloody swords, their own skins without a scratch. They were self-accused.

The upshot of the affair was ruin for all.

Matters in Yotsuya were coming to the official ears. Yoémon was forced to make charges against Akiyama; the more willingly as therein lay a chance to recoup his own losses through the wife he intended to divorce on the morrow.

Kondō easily cleared his skirts of this offence, but was involved with the irate temple priests. All were entangled in the heavy

costs of the law of those days. Of these three men something is to be said later.

CHAPTER 20: KIBEI DONO

Kibei was in great straits, financial and domestic.

The death of Kwaiba had brought him anything but freedom. In Nippon the headship of a House is much more than the simple heirship of our western law.

Relieved of his obligation in office the old man's hands were wide open to shower benefice or caprice on the most worthless.

Endorsement for cash and goods to Natsumé, Imaizumi, and Kamimura; donations to the temples of Teramachi and the Yotsuyazaka; favours in every direction except that of Akiyama Chōzaémon, in the pursuit of whom Kwaiba found much amusement; all these items added to the very free living in his household had pledged deeply the ample revenue of two hundred and thirty tawara, and would have upheld the samurai trait of not knowing the value of

money — if Kwaiba had been of that kind.

Between Kwaiba and Kibei, the wild debauchery of the last year had brought the House to the verge of ruin. Kibei was aghast.

Long since he had become deeply involved with the woman Tamagiku of the Kashiku the Yamadaya in Edomachi Itchōme of the Yoshiwara. The ugly fellow was madly in love with the beauty. On her he had poured out the treasures of the

Itō House during the six months which preceded the illness of Kwaiba.

During his prolonged absence from her the letters of the Kashiku had inundated the writing table of Kibei. Had he deserted her? Was all affection gone? Where now were the promises of ransom, the blood-sealed vow to become husband and wife, to assume the relation which endures for two worlds?

Kibei sullenly read these lines; cursing Kwaiba and cursing himself. Ransom! With strict living for the next five years he might set matters straight and free the Tayu; and any day she might be bought by some rich country samurai or gentleman farmer, or be carried off to ornament the bessō of some hatamoto.

Kibei wiped the bitter saliva from his lips.

The domestic difficulties were accompaniment to these more important matters.

In the large mansion Kibei was now alone. The tenth day had witnessed the flight of the last of the servants. The women had departed with the funeral, through fear, sacrificing wages and even such clothing as could not surreptitiously be removed.

What woman — or man — could remain in a house which was

the nightly scene of such fearful sounds of combat.

Shrieks, wails, groans, came from the quarters once occupied by the dead Kwaiba.

As to this there was no difference of opinion. The more venturesome had been favoured with actual sight of the scenes enacted. They had seen the old man as he was in death, pursued from room to room by two frightful hags, as gaunt, blear, sightless as himself.

Dreadful were the cries of the dead man as the harpies fastened upon him, descending from above like two huge bats. These scenes took place usually at 1am, not to cease until dawn.

As for the men servants, they took their leave in the days following, asking formal dismissal with recommendation to another House. They scented the approaching ruin of their present employer.

One day Kakusuké presented himself.

Kibei looked up. He understood at once that the man had come in his turn to take leave. Kakusuké alone had remained with him.

He was servant, stable boy, cook, maid; and did the work of all four without complaint. The change in his master was too marked.

Kibei, in his turn, had become irritable, timorous, subject to outbreaks of almost insane rage.

To Kakusuké the young man seemed to have lost all nerve. Kakusuké wanted to serve a man. As long as the young lord gave promise of redemption, of rising above his difficulties and emerging into a splendid career in which Kakusuké could take pride, the servant was ready to take the bitter with the sweet,

but to be maid servant and keeper of a man half mad had no attraction for this blunt-nerved fellow.

He spoke plainly — "The young lord should deign to throw up the whole connection. Under the present conditions the ruin of the House is unavoidable. Condescend to return to the original House in Honjō Yokogawa. This course will be best. At least the young lord secures his own salvation. This

is the advice of Kakusuké, grown old in experience of service in a samurai household. In naught else is there hope. As to himself, would the young lord condescend to grant dismissal."

Long had been the intimacy between Itō Kwaiba and Inagaki Shōgen.

Kakusuké, the messenger between the two Houses, had watched this Fukutarō grow to manhood, had noted his prowess. It was with delight he

had carried the documents which were to bring this new and vigorous blood into the home of his decadent master. This was the result.

Kibei swore to himself — ‘A pest on these witches — and their craft!’

But he heard Kakusuké out with growing anger.

As the man's words gathered vigour and plain spoken-ness his hand wandered to his sword. He

had a mind to cut him down then and there for his freedom of speech.

More than half induced to recognize the truth of the indictment his better feeling halted him.

With harsh and sardonic tone he gave unbelieving thanks for the implied reproof of the servant. The service of Kakusuké had been faithful beyond measure. It should have its proper reward. If others had chosen to depart

as do those who run away, they had shown ignorance of this Kibei.

From a drawer of the desk he took out a letter already prepared, a roll containing wages. He pushed the low table toward Kakusuké. This readiness, as if foreseen, hit the man hard.

Respectfully he pressed the letter to his forehead, bowing with extended hands on the mat; the money he did not

touch. Finally he raised a timid questioning glance to his now former master.

Said Kibei jeeringly — "Kakusuké has given his advice. Is it part of his long experience that a servant should question the wages placed under his nose? Off with you! This Kibei would be alone; most willingly so."

At the peremptory threatening gesture Kakusuké no longer hesitated. He had no inclination

to be a victim of one of the mad outbreaks of the young man.

Taking the payroll humbly he backed out of the room. His steps were heard a few minutes later passing the entrance.

Then the outer gate shut to with a clang.

For a long watch Kibei sat in meditation. He was as one who sleeps.

Then he rose with decision. "'Tis the last chance. Kakusuké is

right. The matter is to be brought to an end."

Dressing for the street he left the house.

He opened the big gate; then went to the stable, and saddled and bridled his horse. He led it outside, closed the gate, and mounting he rode forth, to go to Honjō Yokogawa and the yashiki of his father, Inagaki Shōgen.

Coming unaccompanied he was received with surprise and some

discomfiture, as he was quick to note. He was very quick to note things in these days.

Prostrating himself before his mother — "Kibei presents himself. Honoured mother, deign to pardon the intrusion. Fukutarō would solicit her pity and influence."

The lady looked at him with amazement. "Fukutarō! What then of Kibei? Is some jest deigned at the mother's expense? It is in very bad

taste.... But the face of Kibei implies no jest. Pray put the matter plainly. Why does her son come in petition to the mother?"

Began Kibei — "The matter is most serious...."

He went into the full details; from the time of his entrance into the Itō House, through the course of dissipation and illness of Kwaiba, down to the present ruined state of affairs.

"All this is due to the curse of Lady Iwa San, to this plot in which Kibei foolishly engaged."

Of this he now fully felt the force. The events of the past weeks had wrecked him in mind and body. One disaster after another, in house and neighborhood, had been visited on Kibei.

The bitterness and dislike of the people toward Kwaiba was visited on his representative, who was held responsible. In his

great mansion he lived alone. No servant would enter it to attend to his wants.

Was he to cook and be valet for himself — and pose as the Kumigashira, the great chief of the neighborhood! The position was an impossible one.

“Deign to use a mother's influence with Inagaki Dono. Condescend to secure permission for the return of this Kibei to his original House, for

the cancellation of the adoption."

The wife of Shōgen sat frightened; at the tale, and at this radical way of finding an exit from the situation.

The mother's heart was full of pity for the distracted son, whose haggard looks showed the strain of the past weeks.

Besides she was a woman, and as such fully believed in and feared the curse of this dead

Lady Iwa, one who had died without funeral rites or prayer.

Said she — "Fortunately the honoured father now is on the night watch at the castle. He is at home, drinking his wine. His humour is excellent. Wait but a moment."

Leaving Kibei she went to the room of Shōgen's light indulgence. The severe and conscientious nobleman was bending under the genial influence of the saké.

Said he — "Kibei? He comes in good season. The heir of Kwaiba Inkyō has not favoured his real father of late. Ah! The boy was well placed. Kwaiba soon made way for him; and none too willingly, one can believe." He chuckled.

Then noting his wife's troubled looks. "But there is something to tell."

"So indeed; none too pleasant."

She went into the story Kibei had told her.

"His fear of Lady Iwa San is deadly. The House is ruined, with no profit in the connection. Deign to permit the cancellation of the adoption, his return to the House of his true parent."

She stopped before the stern astonished look of the husband.

Said he harshly — "Let him come up. Shōgen answers Kibei Dono in person.... Heigh! Up

here with you! For Itō Dono there is wine...."

Kibei entered joyfully at his father's call. Success was in his hands. Once more he was to marshal his father's retainers and accompany him to the castle; once more be the habitué of the fencing rooms. "Honoured father, fear enters: for long this Kibei has not ventured into your presence."

"And need not for long again," thundered the old man. "What

stuff is this for the ears of Shōgen? Kibei would sever his connection with the Itō House. Kibei is afraid of a ghost! He fears a girl! A samurai wearing two swords shrinks from an encounter with a woman! Has Shōgen no obligation toward his old friend Kwaiba? In more serious matters and in life Shōgen would share Kwaiba's lot. Back with you to the house in Yotsuya! If this matter become known, both Kibei and Shōgen will be the laughing

stocks of Edo. At least keep such fears to yourself. Off with you! Shōgen had wine for Itō Dono. For the fellow who would call himself — “Fukutarō”, he has none."

With a kick he sent rolling the table with its burden of bottles and heating apparatus. In a rage he left the room.

Kibei's face was white as he raised it from the mat. "Father has no experience of ghosts; he

speaks at random and in anger. Terrible is the actuality."

Said the mother, slowly and painfully — "He is the father; he is to be obeyed."

Kibei was sitting upright. He nodded grave assent.

Then suddenly he prostrated himself ceremoniously before the shōji through which Shōgen had disappeared. He repeated the salutation before his mother.

Then he rose — "Itō Kibei takes leave. May good health and fortune visit those of this House."

At his exit the mother rejoiced. Severe had been the father's words, but they had brought the boy to reason.

She wept and trembled at the reproof. Men had best knowledge of such affairs.

She would pray at Reiganji, and have memorial service held for

the peace of this Lady Iwa in the next world. Then the curse would not rest upon her son.

On his appearance at the house entrance a foot soldier led up the horse. Kibei waved him away — "For the present keep the animal in charge. With matters to attend to close at hand Kibei will use other conveyance."

The man took the animal away.

Leaving the gate of the yashiki Kibei walked the short distance to the Hōonji bridge. Here was a litter stand. He ordered — "To Yamadaya in Yoshiwara."

As the litter men went off at a trot — "Kibei has played and lost. How does the account yonder stand? Seventy ryō owed at the Matsuminatoya. For the rest, this Kibei can claim a night's attendance from the kashiku. If affection would not grant it, the huge sums

bestowed in the past have a claim upon her. Then to end matters and die like a samurai. Tomorrow Kibei cuts belly."

It was the debt which sent him direct to the Yamadaya, and not first to the tea house.

Sitting over the wine all effort of the Kashiku to enliven him failed.

Noting her discomfiture he smiled gloomily.

Then in explanation — "The thoughts of Kibei go astray. The House is ruined. Ransom is impossible. This is the last meeting. To-morrow Kibei cuts belly, and dies like a samurai."

At first the girl thought he was joking. Then noting the wild look of despair in his eyes, she was frightened.

Partly in disbelief; partly seeking to postpone this desperate resolve, to turn his thoughts and gain time for

reflection; partly in that sentimental mood which at times affects this class of women — "Is Kibei truly ruined? Lamentable the fate of this Tamagiku. Why not join Kibei in death? But the idea is too new. Deign to postpone the execution for a space. To-night shall be a night of pleasure with the Kashiku Tamagiku. With the morrow's darkness she dies with Kibei. Hand in hand they will wander the paths of Amida's paradise."

She came close to him in service of the wine; put her arms about him, and drew him to her bosom; in every way cajoled and sought to comfort him, and corrupt his purpose.

Consent was easy. The night was passed in love and wine.

In the morning he left her.

Kibei was making his final preparations; writing directions which would benefit as far as

possible the House in Honjō at the expense of that in Yotsuya.

In the Yoshiwara a very different scene was taking place. With his departure the Kashiku sprang up. Hastily throwing a robe around her person she sought the room of the yarité — the bawd of the house. "The Kashiku! At this hour — what has happened?"

"Something of importance. This night Tama dies with Kibei

Dono. The compact is closed, hard and firm."

The astonished bawd had been rubbing the sleep out of her eyes. The last words brought her full awake — "Is the Kashiku drunk with wine? Is she mad? Truly it would seem so. And the bail? What is to become of the unfortunate? True it is Toémon of Honjō; and he has trouble enough already. He will never leave his prison."

Tamagiku made a gesture of impatience — "This Tama has acted but to gain time. Can she have affection for such an ugly fellow? Was she to be the victim of some crazy outburst? Perhaps the day will bring better counsel; but the night's conversation does not augur it. His plans are most complete. The master must be seen. Deign to mediate; prevent the admittance of Kibei Dono as guest."

Lady Kayo the bawd nodded intelligence and assent. At once she sought the master of the house.

"A dangerous guest," was his comment. "Send to the Matsuminatoya. They must be warned. We can look after ourselves." As an attendant of the tea house presented himself he greeted — "And the master, Teisuké San!"

The stranger responded — "Is absent; this Tōsuké represents

him. He has gone to Edo. Perhaps the house will deign to look at a new inmate. A true Tayu! The daughter of Akiyama San of Yotsuya sacrifices her caste. But sixteen years, she is a jewel. Less than a hundred ryō will buy her. He is in great difficulties." Tōsuké spoke with enthusiasm.

The master of the Yamadaya answered promptly and with emphasis — "Accepted: let her be on hand in the course of the

day. But Tōsuké, there is another matter. Kibei Dono no longer can be accepted as a guest."

He went into details.

Tōsuké drew a long breath. "A dangerous fellow! The Danna Sama never liked his presence. But he owes the house much money; seventy ryō."

"That is your affair," coldly replied the master of the Yamadaya. "This house answers

not for the accounts of the tea-house. Previous notice has been given. Kibei Dono cannot be received as guest."

"That is not to be denied. He is most undesirable. But the seventy ryō! And the week's settlement to make with this house?"

The Yamadaya had an idea — "It rarely passes a hundred ryō.... Five years is accepted? Then take thirty ryō and deliver this girl to the Yamadaya.... A true

Tayu? If so the debt of Kibei finds payment."

Tōsuké agreed with joy.

At night the litter man set Kibei down before the Matsuminatoya.

Teisuké, the host, regarded his arrival with mixed feelings. His coming meant something. Giving up his two swords, and once seated, Kibei's first act was to give thanks for past services. Calling for his account

he produced the seventy ryō in its settlement. Prompt and profound were the humble thanks of the house for this unexpected liquidation.

Kibei had secured the money by the transfer of obligations of Akiyama Chōzaémon to the usurer Suzuki Sanjurō.

Three hundred and fifty ryō immediately due against seventy ryō in cash satisfied even this shark.

Teisuké was impressed. How deny such a guest? He would get rid of him, and profit both ways.

Yamadaya now would promptly pay the additional seventy ryō due on the girl with whom they were so delighted. He had paid fifty ryō for her.

At Kibei's call his order was prompt. "Tōsuké, accompany Kibei Dono to the Yamadaya."

Kibei's calm and collected manner reassured him. This man did not contemplate suicide.

With the appearance of Tōsuké and Kibei at the Yamadaya there was a flutter.

The Bantō Matsuzo respectfully came forward. As Kibei came up to the rōka and shook off his geta he interposed.

"Deign to wait, Kibei Dono. Matters have changed since

morning. The Kashiku is very ill. She can see no one. Condescend to come another time. For one ill in body pleasure is no pastime. Pray consider; grant excuse for this one occasion."

Kibei was surprised. He had left her perfectly well in the morning. Something in the bantō's face, in the massed position of the men standing by, apprised him of the truth.

He was enraged at the lie and the insult. "Ill? That is very

strange, when so well at morning. But it is immaterial. Kibei goes to the room."

"Impossible," was the firm reply of the bantō. "The Kashiku lies isolated from all. It is the order of the physician. Even those in the rooms around her have been ordered out. Pray forbear."

But Kibei was obstinate — "Then a glass of wine at her bedside; Kibei has matters to impart."

The bantō stuck to his post — "Wine! Amid the smell of drugs, the unseemly vessels of the sick room! Such could not be permitted."

Enraged Kibei surged forward before he could be stopped. The bantō went flying a dozen feet. Kibei shaking off restraining arms made a leap toward the stairway.

But the bawd Lady Kayo interposed her vinegary presence. She was brave;

having the support of great numbers, of the whole household.

"What rudeness! How inconsiderate your way of acting! You behave in very bad taste; with the roughness of a foot solider. The Yamadaya does not entertain such miserable scamps! The Tayu is ill. This Kayo says it. Get you hence — to some workhouse. Return the day before yesterday."

Kibei gave a yell — "Yai! You old bitch! The whole affair is plain to Kibei. Out of money, his presence is no longer desired. Ah! Kibei will have vengeance."

Without sword, before the sullen determination of these plebeians, he felt his helplessness. An unseemly brawl, in which he would be worsted, must not be entered on. He must leave.

In a towering rage he strode back to the tea-house.

Tōsuké tried to keep pace with him.

Said Teisuké in feigned astonishment — "Kibei Dono! What has happened?"

Kibei did but stutter and fume.

The host turned to Tōsuké. This latter made answer for his charge — "At the Yamadaya they were very rude. Admittance was refused to Kibei Dono. The bawd Lady Kayo told

him to come back day before yesterday!"

"Very rude indeed! Were such things said? It is unpardonable. An explanation must be had with the house. Danna Sama, for to-night deign to leave this matter to Teisuké. Ample satisfaction shall be had for the outrage." Teisuké threw up his hands as with uncontrollable anger.

Kibei paid no attention, but demanded his swords.

Outwardly he had regained his self-control.

The maid Lady Moto looked with diffidence at her mistress. The woman was accustomed to such scenes. At her sign the girl brought the weapons, carefully wrapped up. She placed them before Kibei.

Unrolling the cover he put them on. With scanty salutation he strode off.

Teisuké watched him — "It would be wise for the Yamadaya to close early to-night, to take in their lanterns; nay, even to board up the front and take refuge in the store-house."

Tōsuké was in no hurry to face Matsuzo, the bantō of Yamadaya. Continued the easy old fellow — "Well, 'tis their affair. They are as good judges as Teisuké; and they could have been more civil in refusal. At all events the house has seventy

ryō, and Kibei Dono is sober. He will cut belly before dawn; and perhaps nothing will happen hereabouts."

The old pimp went off to his inner room; to sit down before his wine about the same time that Kibei did the same in a cook shop opposite the great gate of Yoshiwara.

Here he idled, barely touched his drink, and passed the time in bantering the maid servant. He was in a riotous humour. He

would take her to wife — and sell her the next morning. "As they do yonder."

But Lady Kiyo was not of that kind. "There is a lover?"

"Of course!" In admitting it she blushed, somewhat offended at hint of suspicion that such was lacking.

Jibed Kibei — "He will do the same. Better to be the wife of a samurai; even for an hour."

In the end he frightened the girl a good deal, so boisterous was he.

She had gone out to buy him a deep hat. With relief she saw him put it on and set forth into the darkness and the rain.

1am was nearly ready to ring.

The pleasure quarter was silent. Passersby were few. The occasional shuffling sound of zōri sandals could be heard behind the closed amado.

Kibei smiled cynically as he recognized this mark of revolting passage from one room to another. In doubt he stood before the gate of the Yamadaya. How break in and kill them all? If Kibei had his way the Kashiku would keep her word.

Just then a noise of voices was heard within, the falling of the bar. Several belated guests came forth. They were in the

charge of Lady Moto, the maid of the Matsuminatoya.

Affectionate were the leave-takings with the quondam wives. "Condescend an early visit. This Haya lives but in the thought of Mosuké."

"Bunzaémon San, be faithful to this Hana. In his absence she is always ill. She receives no one."

At this there was a roar of laughter from the others of the company.

Bunzaémon answered with reproaches.

Kibei followed behind. This fellow Bunzaémon was somewhat lamed. He lagged behind.

Kibei pulled his sleeve. Bunzaémon turned in surprise and fear at sight of the samurai in his deep hat.

Said Kibei — "Don't be afraid. Bunzaémon San has forgotten

pipe, or purse, or something. He must go back to the Yamadaya."

At the fellow's groping in his garments and failure to understand he grew impatient. "A friend lies at the Yamadaya. It is late, and they will not open at an unknown voice. Entrance somehow must be had. Deign to lend your aid."

At last the fellow comprehended — "Lady Moto San! A moment: my pipe...."

"Oh! The Danna Sama has forgotten his pipe?" The girl went back the short distance to the gate. She knocked and called.

With sleepy tones the voice of Matsuzo the bantō was heard. The bar fell. The girl turned to look down the street toward her guests. She looked right into the face of Kibei.

Dropping her lantern, with a smothered scream she fled.

Matsu, the bantō, looked with horror at the man before him.

As Kibei threw off his hat he turned to flee. Tripping, he fell. Kibei drew him back by the leg. A blow cut him through the shoulder. As he rose staggering a second vicious side swing sent the severed head to the ground.

The gate-man took the chance. Fleeing to the recesses of the kitchen, he swarmed up a post and hid himself among the

rafters of the roof, amid the darkness of their shadows.

Kibei turned back and carefully barred the gate. With the key at the girdle of Matsuzo he locked the bar chain. All was now ready for his visitation and search.

On the floor above they had a drunken guest in hand, trying to get him to depart.

A bantō and several women formed the committee of

expulsion. "Ah! Money gone, one's welcome is quickly worn out in this hell. But Jusuké does not budge. He fears not the whole pack of foxes…. Thanks: deep the obligation of this Jusuké, extending to the next life.

A woman had picked up and restored his purse. "The bill is paid? An early start Tōkaidō way? Ah, true! Jusuké had forgotten." He was now all compliments and thanks. Then

in a rage — "Oh! The huzzy! What is Jusuké's purse worth with nothing in it? Who has robbed the purse of Jusuké?" He was madly fumbling his tobacco pouch.

A woman put his hand on the missing object in the folds of his girdle. He was mollified.

As they moved to the head of the stairs — "Take care! Jusuké San, don't fall! Bantō San, deign to aid the guest."

Refusing all help the man lurched half way down the flight. Then he stopped, staring and looking before him.

At the foot stood Kibei, bloody sword in hand.

"Down with this Jusuké? But Jusuké cannot down. A fool blocks the way.... Fool, you block the way of Jusuké." —

"Out of the road, drunkard!" The words of Kibei came between his teeth, half growl,

half snarl. The man obstinately held his own.

When Kibei would push past him — "Beast!" He struck the samurai.

Kibei whirled the sword. The head rolled to the bottom of the steps. The blood bathed Kibei from head to foot.

His appearance was horrible.

The women fled in all directions. The bantō covered their retreat.

"Kibei Dono! Pray be reasonable. Control yourself!"

Kibei made a step toward the women's rooms. The bantō was dreadfully frightened, yet bravely he interposed to save them. He shouted for aid; below and to the neighbors.

Kibei reached him. A blow and he fell severed. Kibei gave a howl of joy.

Lady Kayo the bawd came out to ascertain the cause of the

brawl. She turned livid with fear on recognizing Kibei. They were standing together in the sort of entresol or room at the head of the stairway.

Only a large brazier separated Kibei from his vengeance. Its massiveness of three or four feet breadth baffled him.

The woman was fleeing for life. As Kibei strove to get within striking distance fear gave her wings. From one side to another she leaped and dodged.

Kibei was hampered. He had to cut her off from stair and rōka. As he hesitated she discharged the iron kettle at his head. One implement followed another. In hurling the iron tripod ashes entered her eyes.

At once Kibei leaped to close quarters.

The first sword blow she dodged. As Kibei recovered she sprang by him and over the brazier, seeking the safety of the stairs now open to her. Her

night-dress caught on the handle of the brazier and brought her to the ground.

Next moment she was severed from shoulder to midriff.

Methodically Kibei began his examination of the rooms. To most of the inmates this uproar was a mere quarrel in the house, the cause of which they neither knew nor cared to know.

The first search was at the room of the Kashiku, close to that of

Lady Kayo the bawd. Her reception room was dark. Here the Kashiku's bed usually was prepared. The inner room, her dressing room, showed the dim light of a lamp.

Noting her absence from the usual place a hasty stride brought him to the shōji. As he violently shoved them apart a man rose from the bed in the room. A mere glance showed that this was no lover.

As Kibei with drawn sword stood over him, he squatted on his hams, crouching and begging for life.

To Kibei's astonishment he called him by name — "Deign, honoured Kibei, to spare this Chōbei. Be assured the Kashiku is not in this place. She lies to-night with the Danna of the house. Deign to seek her in his company." He pointed vaguely as he spoke, to give direction.

Kibei laughed ferociously. From this source these directions were atrocious.

He lowered the weapon — "Chōbei! At this place and time! Well met, good Sir. Kibei is doubly grateful for what he has learned. Chōbei and Kibei are fellows in fortune. Willingly Kibei leaves him to Lady Iwa San and her mercies." His attentive gaze never wandered from the face of the one-time pimp.

With a gesture of horror he rushed from the room. In fright Chōbei rolled his head up in the coverlet, to keep out the vision evoked.

Kibei continued his search.

"Is it my little black fellow?" Such the greeting of one woman aroused from sleep. Trembling she rose at sight of Kibei.

Harshly told to lie down, she gladly obeyed. Her quivering

limbs already were nearly yielding as he spoke.

In but one place did he encounter opposition. Pushing open the shōji of the merest closet of a room he came upon a girl whose face somehow was familiar.

She was a mere slip of a creature to be called a woman. The undeveloped hips, the yet immature bosom, aroused his astonishment at finding her in such a place as inmate; that is,

until the pure oval and beauty of the face caught his glance.

As he entered she sprang up in alarm. Just roused from sleep she hardly knew where she was — "Father! Father! A man! A man is in the room! Help!"

Kibei pushed her back on the bed. With his bloody sword he rolled over the bed-clothes. Then he made a move to get at the closet behind. Perhaps mistaking his action the girl sprang upon him.

Kibei was startled at her mad energy. When he thrust her down she seized his hand in her teeth, sinking them deep into it.

Pain and impatience — after all he was pressed for time — overcame him.

Unable otherwise to shake her off he thrust the point of the sword into her throat and gave a vigorous downward push. Coughing up great clouts of blood, the girl sank back, dying on the futon.

As he left the room remembrance came to Kibei's mind. He had seen her in Yotsuya. More than once Lady Tsuru had served him tea in the house of her father, Chōzaémon. How came she in this vile den?

He took a step back to aid her if he could. She was stone dead.

The Tayu Nishikiyama now knew the cause of the disturbance.

To the frightened serving boy who came running to her — "Be quiet child. This is no time to lose self-control. Aid me in preparation."

She dressed herself with the greatest care; all in white, as befitted a lady in attendance on a nobleman. Then she took down her koto and struck the opening bars of an old and famous song — the "Jinmujō, Inexhaustible Happiness” — said to have been sung by the

famous Shizuka Gōzen when she danced the Hōraku, or sacred dance, before the Shōgun Yoritomo at Kamakura Hachimangū.

As Kibei turned into the corridor the voice of the Oiran caught his ear as she sang in accompaniment to the instrument.

She was bending over the koto as the shōji were flung apart. Kibei, his hair hanging in disorder and framing a face

ghastly white in contrast to the red streaks splashed over it and his garments, stood transfixed at the entrance.

The Tayu looked up. With calm pose and courteous salute — "Kibei Dono, what manner of acting is this! Is not Kibei Dono the samurai? Truly madness has seized you, honoured Sir. This is Nishikiyama.... Deign to be seated. 'Tis Nishikiyama who serves Kibei Dono. What has been done cannot be undone.

The last cup of wine in life is to be drained. Deign to accept it from these humble hands."

Kibei continued gazing on her.

The unhappy man, his mind was opened to a flood of light. The hurricane of passion was passing. Slowly he advanced into the room. "Truly the Go Tayu is right. Kibei has gone mad; mad indeed!"

He sank down on the cushion before her. At a sign the page

placed the stand containing the bottle of cold saké before the lady. Skilfully the slender hands held it, gracefully poured it for the man doomed to death, taking this final cup served by her.

Kibei raised it, drained it to the last drop. "The Kashiku: she is on this lower floor. Where lies she?"

Nashikiyama noted the wild light returning to his eyes. She bowed her head before him —

"The life of Nishikiyama is at the command of Kibei Dono. Her lips are sealed. Honoured Sir, how answer Kibei Dono's question?"

For the moment he looked down. Then he rose — "Whose daughter can the Oiran be! Truly no lady in the land could show a higher courage, a finer courtesy. The final salute of this Kibei in life is to the Go Tayu."

In grave ceremony it was performed. As he left the room

the woman buried her face in her hands, weeping bitterly. In wonder and gratitude the frightened page extended her hands, her face hidden in the white robes of the Go Tayu.

Kibei trod this lower corridor with sombre tread. He would cut belly at the garden pond.

With some surprise he noted an amado open at the end of the rōka. Voices were heard. Standing at the opening he saw lanterns.

Some frenzied women had raised a ladder to the garden wall. They would thus escape, but the knife-like bamboo stakes prevented.

Said a voice outside, and close to him — "The key to the gate: here it is."

The Kashiku at a run passed by him.

Kibei gave a shout.

The frightened woman turned, recognized him, then sped on.

In a few steps he was on her. The raised sword descended as she fell on her knees before him, in attempt to swerve its course.

Through wrist and collar-bone, from neck to navel, the keen blade passed.

Kibei threw the weapon aside. He leaned over her, his dagger drawn, and severed her head. Then he rose, holding by its tresses the head.

For a moment he gazed on it. Slowly he walked to the pond in the centre of the garden. Carefully he washed the bloody trophy and placed it on the curbing. Confronting it he made reverential salutation. "Kibei keeps his promise to the Kashiku. With Tamagiku he treads the gloomy paths of Shideyama. Honoured lady — a moment and Kibei follows."

Seated before the head reposing on the curb he opened his

clothes. Thrusting the bloody dagger deep into his left side he slowly drew it across the belly; then made the upward cut. The body fell forward.

Kibei indeed had kept his word.

CHAPTER 21: MATTERS ECCLESIASTICAL

Inagaki Shōgen received the news at dawn, just as he was leaving the castle on completion of his night watch.

The old knight smiled gravely, thanked the bearer of the message, and rewarded him with lavish hand. The litter bearers jolted on.

The news had reached the train, and servant and spearman exchanged whispers.

On arrival at the Inagaki yashiki his lordship made no motion to descend.

The chamberlain raising the curtain gave a cry of horror.

The old man lay stretched at the bottom of the little chamber. The dagger and the pool of blood told the tale.

Shōgen had followed the example of his son. He, too, now trod the paths of Shideyama.

With laggard tottering step Akiyama Chōzaémon entered his house.

Regardless of wife and the cushion she offered, of the hardly repressed tear in her salutation, he cast himself full length on the mats.

He buried his face in his arms. The groans which issued from

the prostrate body frightened the woman.

"The honoured return; has other misfortune fallen on the House?"

A shrug of the shoulders, a shiver; then the man half rose and faced her. She was startled at his expression.

He was facing the most dreadful, not mere thought of ruin to him and his — "Suzuki San is liar and thief. Fifty ryō in

hand the promise was for abstention. Now he demands twenty ryō more — the interest on the debt in full." His voice rose to a harsh scream.

He laughed despairingly. "Seventy-five ryō interest, for the loan of a month; and that loan forced on this Chōzaémon by Itō Kwaiba! Kibei has squandered everything. The loan comes back on the bail. If Suzuki holds the interest in hand, he allows the principal,

three hundred and fifty ryō, to stand for the month. Unless he has the lacking twenty-five ryō by 9am to-morrow, complaint is laid at the office. As usual the interest is written into the face of the bond. The end is certain. This Chōzaémon must cut belly or suffer degradation."

He looked her over critically. The light of hope died out of his eyes — "Ah! If this Tsuyu could but be sold, the money would be

in hand. But she is old and ugly. Pfaugh!..."

How he hated her at this moment. Some half a dozen years older than Chōzaémon the marriage had been arranged by the parents on truly financial principles.

Mizoguchi Hampei was rich, and reputed stingy and saving. Just recently he had fallen into the Edo River as he returned home late one night. Drunk and surfeited with the foul waters of

the stream they had fished him out stone dead.

Then it was learned that the old fellow of sixty odd years had several concubines, of the kind to eat into house and fortune. The reversion of the pension, of course, went to the House.

In all these years Chōzaémon had never received the dower of Lady Tsuyu; nor dared to press the rich man for it, too generous to his daughter to quarrel with.

The funds eagerly looked for by Chōzaémon were found to be non est inventus.

Probably, if alive, Mizoguchi would have argued that the dower had been paid in instalments.

In his grave difficulties Akiyama could find no aid in his wife. She mourned her uselessness — "Willingly would Tsuyu come to the aid of House and husband, join her daughter in the bitter service. But past forty years....

'Tis useless to think of it. Perhaps some expedient will come to mind."

She brought out the arm rest and placed it near his side. Then she sat apart watching him.

From time to time was heard the tap of her pipe as she knocked out the ashes. At last, overcome by sleep and seeing no sign of movement on the husband's part, she went off to bed, expecting that he would soon follow.

She woke with a start. The voice of Lady Tsuru rang sharply in her ears — "Father! Father!"

Dazed she half rose and looked around her.

The daylight streamed through the closed amado. She had been dreaming. With surprise she noted her husband's absence.

Had he gone forth? The cries of a bean curd seller were heard without — "Tōfu! Tōfu! The best of tōfu!"

The palatable, cheap, and nutritious food was a standard meal in this house as in many others of Nippon.

Akiyama was most generous in indulgence of his passions for gambling, wine, and the women of Shinjuku; and his household with equal generosity were indulged in an economical regimen of tōfu. The wife rose to answer the call of the street huckster.

Her surprise increased as she found every means of exit bolted and barred, as during the night. The open sliding window in the kitchen roof caught her eye. Surely he had not departed that way!

As she opened the back door a murmur of voices, as in the roadway or close by, struck her ear. The tōfu seller had his head turned away looking upward.

At her call he turned quickly with apology — "Good day,

honoured lady. A strange event! Ah! The honoured household still sleeps. All is silent.... Strange indeed! A man has hung himself on the big oak tree in the temple ground. Deign to look."

He pointed to the big tree close by in the grounds of the Myōgyōji.

Sure enough: forty feet from the ground dangled the body of a man. It swayed gently to and fro

in harmony with the movement of the branches.

A hand seemed to grasp the heart of Tsuyu. The branches of the tree reached far over their roof. The open hikimado!

With feeble voice she said — "My husband; he is strangely absent. Deign, somebody, to climb up and find out whether this man is — of the neighborhood."

The startled tōfu seller hastened to get aid. Several men entered the garden, quickly mounted to the roof, and thus reached the tree.

Said the topmost fellow — "Ma! Ma! It is no pretty sight. He makes a hideous spectacle. The face is black as a rice boiler. The eyes stand out as if ready to burst. The tongue hangs out like a true guard. The grin on the distended mouth is not nice to see. Ah! The rascal has used the

merest cord to cut himself off. And he has nearly done so. The head is almost severed."

He gave a shout — "Oh, I see! Why, its...." One close by silenced him. The men above looked down. They made signs to those below. The women gathered around Lady Tsuyu as if to keep her from the sight.

She broke away from them as the body was gently lowered to the ground. Her shrieks rang loud. They strove to detach her

from the dead body of Chōzaémon.

[At the sight of her husband’s dead face her nightmare came back full force and she was wholly convinced her daughter was dead too]

The House ruined, daughter and husband taken out of her life in a single day; the blow was too crushing for a brain harassed by a life with this debauched worthless man.

Her warders struggled with one gone clean daft.

(Years after men grown up from childhood in the neighborhood looked with pity at the feeble ragged old mad beggar woman who crouched by the beautiful bronze dragon which ornaments the water basin of the Ten-ō Jinja. They would drop in her hand a copper coin, and drive off with rebuke the children who taunted and annoyed her — as they had done years before.)

Thus were mother and daughter — the innocent — involved in the father's crime against the dread Lady of Tamiya.

All these events created a tremendous stir in Yotsuya.

Men disliked to go abroad at night.

Women, to their great inconvenience were confined to the house. Two figures approaching each other in the

darkness would be seen to hesitate and stop.

"What's that — standing, slinking yonder by the wall? Alas! This Kinsaburō, this Genzaémon has evil fortune led him into the clutches of the incubus? Lady Iwa! Lady Iwa!"

With that and mad cries they would fall on each other; at times only to exercise restraint after some injury had been done.

Hence quarrels arose; feuds, started in all innocence, came into being.

Women, as suspects, were chief sufferers. The local atmosphere was overcharged, nerve racked.

And so from Honjō to Nakachō, from Nakanochō to Shinagawa, even in the nearer post towns of Kawasaki, Tsurumi, and Kanagawa the talk was spreading of the strange happenings in Yotsuya of Edo town.

Katada Tatéwaki, descendant of that Katada Samon who, as vassal of Gongen Samon had had this Aoyama-Yotsuya district in fief, now first began his inquiries into the affair.

The Katada had wide possessions elsewhere at the time of the grant. Samon had gifted much of his new fief as temple land, and on the old maps of the day this part of Edo is a blood red splash, indication of these many establishments.

But the Katada influence still prevailed through the neighborhood, indeed through the more than good will of the beneficiaries.

Tatéwaki's yashiki was at the top of Ushigomézaka. His modest pension of a thousand koku by no means represented the extent of his power.

Iémon became frightened at the storm gathering against him. He was open to all suggestions of remedy for the cataleptic state

into which Lady Hana had fallen.

The neighbor gossips suggested calling in the Daihō-in of Shiomachi. A service kept part at least of the money in the neighborhood.

They had their share in provision and consumption; the fifty ryō necessary were much to them — and to Iémon in his present circumstances.

The neighbors were assembled at Tamiya. Iémon went forth to greet the Daihō-in.

With his attendant kannushi and train he presented himself at the entrance.

Iémon was prostrate in salutation before the great man. — "Reverential thanks for the condescension. Deign to enter this unfortunate house."

The Shintō priest was brusque, as is the way of the kind.

Himself he was the samurai, with all the tone of official manner. "Ha! Ha! Salutation to all." He gave a comprehensive glance through the assembly and lost none of them in the process.

He approached the couch of Lady Hana.

He opened the closed eyes, which stared fixedly into space as of one dead. He raised an arm upright from the body. Stepping aside, he squatted.

Some moments passed.

The arm remained rigidly upright.

Satisfied, the Daihō-in signed to his attendants. Raising Lady Hana they placed her in a sitting posture on a mat.

Her hair was arranged in ichōmage. A gohei was placed between her hands.

Then the Daihō-in began the recitation of the prayers and charms. The other priests gave

voice at times in response. All present were awe-struck. The women hardly breathed, leaning eagerly forward. Their eyes took on a vacant stare, as if themselves mesmerized. The gohei began to tremble; then to shake violently.

The woman's hair fell down in disorder around her face. All turned away their faces. Some women gave smothered cries.

It was Lady Iwa San who glared at them out of those eyes.

The Daihō-in eagerly leaned close over Lady Hana — "Lady Iwa: where are you? What has become of your body? Be sure to speak the truth. Don't attempt to lie to the priest.... You don't know? Ah! you would be obstinate in your grudge. The charm shakes and quivers; it possesses Lady Iwa.... You would rest in Samonchō ground? That is much to ask; particularly when the body is not in hand.... A substitute will do? Ah! Prayers?... For a year, at

morn and night of each day? That is terrific. Consider the cost.... You care not for the cost! Only then will you cease to afflict the neighborhood?... Very well: humbly this Daihō-in transmits the will of the dead."

Thus did the priestly mediator interpret to his gaping auditors the mumbling and cries given forth by Lady Hana.

The wild look faded from her eyes. She rolled over as in a faint.

The priests raised her up. The Daihō-in turned to Iémon and the assembly — "The words of Lady Iwa have been heard through this woman. Lady Hana has been possessed by Lady Iwa. Hence her trance.... Heigh! Water!"

He began making passes over his patient — "The stage has passed. Lady Hana no longer is possessed by Lady Iwa. The wronged lady leaves Lady Hana to peace. Lady Hana is

completely herself again. Lady Iwa is all delusion. Lady Hana believes this. She believes firmly. The Daihō-in tells her to believe. Lady Iwa does not haunt Lady Hana. Lady Iwa has no ill will against Lady Hana."

He looked fixedly and with command into the eyes of Lady Hana. His voice rang clear and authoritative.

Then he began gently to stroke the back of her head, her neck and spine. "All is well?"

"Hai! Hai! This Hana is completely restored. All is well." With a little sigh she sank back, to be laid on the cushions in a sleep which all wondered to see was most natural.

Those present were in transports of delight.

They buzzed approval as the Daihō-in addressed Iémon. "The Daihō-in has done his part. All have heard the words of Lady Iwa San. The rest lies with the

temple. Deign to receive these words. The Daihō-in returns."

With his pack voicing loudly at his tail he left the entrance gate. The assembly streamed after.

Iémon was left alone, biting his thumbs in helpless rage.

He was aghast. "The old fox! What is to be done, pressed as Iémon is for funds? How is this Iémon to act? Refusal means the open hostility of the whole

neighborhood. It will turn against him. Ah! What a miserable old scamp. He did it all himself; he and his confederates. The gods descend from above; the Daihō-in shakes the gohei from below — and those fools believe, to the ruin of Iémon!"

Hence he would have postponed the costly appeal to the temple.

Within the week a committee of the neighborhood waited upon him.

As if expecting them, Iémon gave ready compliance. With four or five other gentlemen he waited upon Shūden Oshō, the famous priest of the temple of the Gyōran Kwannon.

The Lady Merciful, Kwannon Sama, seemed the fitting deity to whom appeal should be made.

A word is to be said as to this famous manifestation of the goddess. Told by Ryuō at length,

of necessity here the account is much abridged.

Gyōran Kwannon — Kwannon of the fish-basket — has several other names. She is called the Namagusai Kwannon, from the odour of fresh blood attached to the pursuit; the Byaku Kwannon, or the white robed; the Baryufu Kwannon, as wife of Baryu the fisherman.

The image of the Byaku Kwannon exists. It is carved in white wood, stained black, with

a scroll in the right hand, and holding a fish basket in the left hand.

The story of Baryu, and of his connection with Kwannon, is of more moment.

In China there is a place called Kinshaden. Across the bay from Edo-Tōkyō is Kazusa with its ninety-nine villages, one of which has the same name — Kinshaden.

The fishing population of Nippon is a rough lot. From babyhood there is little but quarrelling and fighting between the bands which control the different wards of the villages. The relations between the people are very primitive.

One of the important occupations is the iwashi, or pilchard, fishing. To pull in the nets loaded with the fish requires the united effort of the

whole village population, men, women, even children.

Among their toilers the people of Kinshaden noted a young girl of some sixteen or seventeen years; easily noted by the great beauty and attraction of face and figure, the willing readiness and wonderful strength she showed in her struggles with the weighted net.

As she appeared several times at last some men went up to her — "Girl, you are a stranger

here. For your aid thanks are offered. Who may you be; and whence from? Strangers, even in kindness, in Nippon must not conceal their names."

The girl smiled. — "I come from Fudarakusan in the South Ocean.... Where is Fudarakusan? It is in India.... And India? It is in the South Ocean, the Nankai."

To the wonder expressed at her coming such a distance of

thousands of ri — "I come, I serve, for my husband." —

"Your husband? Pray who may he be, in these parts?"

"Not yet is he chosen," answered the girl. "Come! The nets are drawn, the fishing ended for the day. I will ascend that rock; read the sutra of the Lady Kwannon. He who can first memorize it shall be my husband."

Ready was the assent to such an attractive proposal — a beautiful helpmate in prospect, one endowed with surprising strength for her frail form, and who seemed to bring luck to the efforts of the village in the struggle for a livelihood. Even the Nipponese prejudice against strangers paled before such practical qualification.

The maid ascended to the rostrum. For three days she

read and expounded the holy sutra of the Lady Kwannon.

On the fourth day the fisherman Baryu — young, handsome, strong — felt sure that he could answer to the test.

"Woman, descend! To-day this Baryu will repeat the sutra, expound its meaning."

With seeming surprise and merriment the girl obeyed. Baryu took her place. Without slip or fault he repeated the

sutra, expounded the intricacies of its meaning.

The girl bowed low in submission. "Condescend to admit my humble person to the hut of Baryu the fisherman. To-night she pollutes with her presence a corner of his bed-chamber."

Rejoicing Baryu at once took her to his home, where he would act the husband.

At first gently she rebuked him. "These rough people of Kinshaden have regard to nothing! There is such a rite as marriage. Nine times are the saké cups to be drained between husband and wife. Thus is established this important relation. In the connection between man and woman there is such a thing as etiquette. This observed, the woman passes to the possession of the man. For the woman, second marriage there is none."

Thus were the decencies of the marriage bed taught to the rough fisherman.

Near dawn Baryu awoke with surprise. His bed-fellow was in the last extremities. Dripping with sweat, she seemed to be melting away. Already she was unconscious.

Then vomiting forth water she died. Baryu was tremendously put out. To lose a wife, who barely had been a wife; one so beautiful, so strong; this was

extremely vexatious. "This won't do at all! Why has such a misfortune befallen this Baryu? Miss Plaster and Miss Stewpan endured without mishap the passage of their marriage night.... Hai! Hai!" in reply to a friend knocking at the door. "Baryu cannot go to the fishing to-day.... The woman? She has died. Baryu's wife is dead."

Opening the door he retailed his experience to the wondering friend. As they talked, along

came a priest most strangely dressed for this land. Approaching them he said — "Is this the house of Baryu?" At the fisherman's acknowledgement — "Has a girl come here?... Dead! Deign to let this foolish cleric hang eyes upon her."

Baryu thought he would take his turn at questions. "And you; whence from?"

"From Fudarakusan in the Nankai."

"Get you hence, frantic interloper," broke in Baryu with grief and anger. "Enough has this Baryu heard of Fudarakusan. Baryu must needs observe his state as widower. The month must pass before he seeks a wife. And more than half its days remain! But look." Mollified by the humble attitude of the priest he went and raised the coverlet from the woman's body. He uttered a cry of surprise. "Oh! Oh! She has disappeared. There is naught

here but a wooden image. Ma! Ma! what a curious figure — with scroll and fish basket, just as the wife appeared at the beach. This is what one reads of in books."

He turned to the priest in wonder and as seeking explanation.

Said the latter with earnest and noble emphasis — "Favoured has been this Baryu. The Kwannon of Fudarakusan of Nankai has shown herself

before his very eyes. For the reform of this wicked people, to teach them the holy writing, she has condescended to submit to the embraces of the fisherman. Let not Baryu think of other marriage. For him has come the call to leave this world. Fail not to obey."

Baryu rushed to the door, to catch but a glimpse of the departing form.

All sign of the priest quickly faded.

Baryu returned to the wooden figure lying where once had reposed the body of the beautiful girl. It was a most unsatisfactory substitute for the flesh and blood original.

But Baryu made the most of it. He took his vow. He shaved his head, becoming a priest to recite and preach the sutra of the Lady Kwannon.

Hence this Kwannon is known as the Baryufu Kwannon — wife of Baryu the fisherman. Hence

she is called the Kwannon of the fish basket, in honour of the aid she brought the people of this village and land.

CHAPTER 22: THE RITES FOR Lady IWA SAN

Iémōn fared as badly at the hands of the Buddha as at those of the Kami.

Shūden Oshō, as guardian of the sacred image of the Gyōran Kwannon, was a very great man indeed. After some delay the deputation from Samonchō was ushered into his presence, Iémon made profound obeisance

and explained the cause of their presence.

The visitations of Lady Iwa to the district were causing the greatest public commotion. Not as a matter of private interest, but of public utility his interference was sought.

If Iémon thought to abstract a copper coin from the priestly treasury he made a gross mistake. Besides, the individual who disturbs the public peace suffers severely from official

mediation, no matter what form this takes.

Shūden inquired minutely as to the visit of the Daihō-in, of which he seemed to have heard.

What information Iémon might have withheld, or minimised, or given a different complexion, was cheerfully volunteered by others, who also corrected and amplified any undue curtailing or ambiguity of their spokesman.

Shūden listened to Iémon with a gravity and an expression hovering between calculation and jeering comment.

He turned from him to the committee, giving great attention to those scholiasts on the text of the orator. He gravely wagged his head in agreement with the rival prelate, whose acumen he highly extolled.

Memorial services were to be provided for a year. It was, after

all, merely a form of restitution to the wronged lady.

But also the wandering spirit of Lady Iwa was to be suitably confined. Here lay the difficulty. Recitation of the sutra for seven continuous days; proper inhumation of the substitute beyond possibility of disturbance, would surely lay a spell on the enraged lady, and put an end to the curse of one dying an unworshipped spirit.

For the burial a bamboo pole was to be provided — of length one one foot nine inches between the joints.

With this notice Iémon and his companions withdrew.

He was resigned to the payment of the fifty ryō necessary for the memorial services extending over the year.

The inclusion in the bamboo was another affair. The finding

of such was about as easy as the fishing for black pearls.

He soon found that securing the substitute and securing the body of Lady Iwa San for proper inhumation were kindred problems.

After looking over all the bamboo which had drifted to Edo and was in the hands of the world secular — and most of it at surprisingly cheap rates — the committee was driven back on the religious world.

They soon found that the article in question was kept in stock only at the Gyōran Kwannondō.

Resorting to the priestly offices, Iémon felt convinced that the grave salutation of the incumbent official — they directed him to the treasury — concealed a derisive grin at his expense.

He was sure of it when he learned that this rare object could be had — for another fifty ryō.

The temple gave no credit; but Suzuki, the usurer who was one of the party, after some demur agreed to hand over the amount, which he had just received from Akiyama Chōzaémon, the service bounty of the daughter Lady Tsuru.

With some reluctance the long nosed, long faced, long limbed Kamimura went security for the repayment on their return to the neighborhood.

With cheerful recklessness Iémon pledged the last chance of any income from the pension and resources of Tamiya for the next three years; so heavily was he in debt.

Shūden on his part lost no time. With at least one member of the committee in attendance, to see that he played fair, for seven days vigorously was the sutra intoned by the loudest and most brazen of his subordinates,

backed by the whole body of priests.

Day and night a priest would slip to the side altar, to invoke the pity of the Buddha on the wandering spirit of the deceased lady in few pithy but hasty words, and to spend the rest of his vigil in a decent slumberous immobility.

The seven days accomplished, the procession formed. Six men in new uniforms — provided by Iémon — made pretence of

great difficulty in carrying the coffin.

Four men carried the sambo, or sacred tray of white wood, on which rested the section of bamboo wrapped by the hands of Shūden himself in the sacred roll of the sutra of Kwannon.

Officialdom of the neighborhood was present. The citizens turned out en masse.

For long Yotsuya had not witnessed such a scene. Within

its precincts the yashiki of the great nobles were conspicuously absent; their long processions of spearman, servant, samurai and officials were only to be witnessed at times on the highway which leaves Shinjuku for the Kōshūkaidō and the alternate and then little used Ashigaratōge road.

Arrived at Samonchō the ground selected was inspected by Shūden. The bishop's

eyebrows puckered in questioning mien.

"Here there are too many people. Is there no other place?" They led him to another site.

The wrinkle deepened to a frown — "Here there are too many children. Their frolics and necessities are unseemly. These would outrage the tender spirit. Is there no other place?"

The committee was nonplussed. Iémon was in terrible fear lest

all his effort and expenditure would go for naught but to swell Shūden's cash roll.

A thought came into his mind. "There is no other open land, but the garden of Tamiya is wide and secluded. The wall prevents public access."

People looked at him aghast. He was either mad with courage, or obstinate in disbelief in the power of Lady Iwa San so plainly manifested.

Shūden paid no attention to that surprised whispering. "Deign to show the way thither."

Thus the procession took its course back to Teramachi and through the gate of Tamiya. A spot was selected, just before the garden gate. It was open to the salutation and vows of passers-by, yet could be shut off from direct access toward house and public.

At Shūden's order a hole was dug, just four feet in depth.

The Oshō began the recitation of the sutra. The priests stood by in vigilant attention. As the last word reverberated on the bishop's lips they seized the sutra wrapped bamboo, slipped it in the long box — bum! the lock snapped.

The congregation was tremendously impressed.

For a decent time Shūden remained in prayer and meditation. Finally — "The charm is complete. Lady Iwa no

longer wanders, to her own penance and the disaster of men. Henceforth he who says she does so lies. Hearken to the words of Shūden. Admit none such to your company. Let not children make this place a playground. Shūden has given warning. Pollution surely follows. Their habits are unseemly, an insult to the dead. Even as to parents, those with infants on their backs are specifically to be excluded."

He tied a paper covered with Sanscrit characters to a bamboo stick. This was placed on a white wood stake.

On the stake he wrote kindred words, converting it into the counterfeit of a sotoba. Neither he nor any present knew what the words meant, or had care as to their ignorance of this essential of religion.

Then he and his train gathered up their gowns and galloped out the gate, after practice and

receipt of grave courtesy, so much did temple differ from shrine in its contact with secular life.

The assembled multitude departed; much edified by the day's proceedings, and with low comment to each other on the dilapidation of Tamiya, its fall from the one time spruce and flourishing state.

"Introduce a spendthrift in the door, and the wealth leaks from every crevice. The spirit of

Tamiya Matazaémon must grieve at this sight. But why did he bring in as heir a stranger?"

Iémon could flatter himself on the efficacy of the divine interposition. The public mind was quieted.

Nothing more was heard of Lady Iwa San. Only the daily summons, on one pretext or another, to the neighborhood office troubled him.

The yakunin also made a practice of taking in Tamiya en route to performance of their various missions. This he knew was a practice as to men under observation.

He went over his career as known to Yotsuya. There was nothing in it to call for question. Official censure does not rest its case on a ghost story. The famous investigation of Echizen no Kami into the Yaeume case of

Yamada was matter of later days.

Moreover, all his troubles were lightened by the state of Lady Hana, the devoted object of unwavering affection.

Ever since the Daihō-in had mesmerized her, impressed his will on her, the daily improvement could be marked.

Now again she was her normal self; sadly thin and worn in spirit, a woman tired out, but

yet the figure of Lady Hana and in her right mind.

To him she was the beautiful tradition of the past and just as beautiful as ever in actuality.

Two weeks had passed since Shūden's experiment. One night, as 9pm, the Hour of the Pig was striking, there came a knocking at the door. Lady Hana rose from her sewing. "Danna, Kamimura San would say a word."

Iémon made a gesture of annoyance. The long man had shadowed him, ever since entering on the engagement of bail. He went to the door and looked at his caller with amazement.

Kamimura, his hair in confusion, was stark naked except for his wife's under cloth — and she was almost a dwarf. He stretched out a hand to Iémon, half in threat, half in begging. "Iémon Uji, a word: condescend

to grant this Goémon ten ryō in silver, not in words. Suzuki the usurer has come on Goémon as bail of Iémon, in the matter of the exorcism. To-day he stripped the house of everything. Wife and children, hungry and almost naked, lie on bare boards. When Goémon begged mercy, that he go to Tamiya, the wretched fellow jeered. 'Tamiya? Tamiya has but brazier and three mats; the clothes worn by himself and wife. The house and land of Tamiya is but a reversion.

Suzuki gets nothing at Tamiya but a lawsuit which would not pay the office fees. Kamimura is rich; his house is well supplied. One petition; and not only expenses, but the debt finds payment. Hence Suzuki troubles not Tamiya.' With this off he went deriding me. Deign the loan, Iémon San. Condescend at least the shelter of clothes and food."

To the wretched fellow Iémon could make no reply.

Ten ryō! Kamimura might as well have asked for ten thousand ryō!

In house and land Iémon was secure. These belonged to the heirship of Tamiya as long as the House maintained its status.

The pension was long mortgaged. The farms had disappeared. The trouble of Goémon pained him. He could only refuse; palliating the refusal with vague promises as to the near future. He would

effect a loan. The debt of Suzuki repaid, all his goods would be restored to Kamimura San.

Goémon took this talk at its real value. Shaking his fist he berated Iémon with violent words. "Ah! Shame is brought to the House of Kamimura, wretchedness to his family — and by this vile stranger. It is Iémon with his heartless wicked treatment of Lady Iwa San, who has wrought distress and ruin to the neighborhood. For Goémon

there is neither food nor clothing? Wait! Time shall bring his vengeance on Iémon and his House."

Iémon would have detained him; sought in some way to mollify him, at least get a hint as to how he purposed injury.

Goémon shook him off as one would a reptile. With a wild laugh he went out naked as he was into the darkness.

He had no definite purpose in mind. However, as he passed the garden gate of Tamiya his eye caught the factitious sotoba standing white in the fitful moonlight.

He stood stock still; then clapped his hands in mad joy and decision.

Hastening to his home he sought out an old battered mattock and a rusty spade.

Soon he was back at the garden gate. A blow and the bar fell. Goémon passed within. "She lies but four shaku deep. The task is quickly performed. None pass here at this hour."

The dirt flew under his nervous arms. Soon he had the box out on the ground beside him. A peal of thunder; he must hasten, or stand a ducking from the coming storm.

He laughed. What had a naked man to fear from getting wet?

The clothes he wore would not spoil. Why did not man dress in a towel, as after the bath; its use, to wipe the moisture from the body.

Now his eyes were fixed in curiosity on the bamboo staff before him. The first few drops of the rainstorm fell on his bare shoulders, but he disregarded them. "Now I see! How heavy it is! Lady Iwa in life hardly weighed more. Lady of Tamiya — show pity on this Goémon.

Iémon and Lady Hana — those wicked voluptuaries — prosper and flourish, while Goémon is brought to beggary and starvation. Deign to visit the wrath of Lady Iwa San on these vile wretches. Seize and kill them. Goémon sets Lady Iwa free."

He seized the mattock. Raising it overhead he brought the edge sharply down on the bamboo stake. At the moment there was

a violent peal of thunder rolling off into a crash and rattle.

The landscape was lit up by the vivid lightning. People uneasily turned over on their beds.

Shortly after dawn Iémon woke with a start.

Don-don-don, don-don-don. There was a tremendous rapping at his door. Lady Hana could hear but a whispered consultation going on without the amado.

Iémon returned to the room. His face was white; his step tottered. Hastily he donned an outer robe. To her question he made scant reply, so agitated was he. His one idea was to keep from her what he had just heard.

In the garden he found his wardsmen assembled. All were dumbfounded and aghast. They looked at each other and then at the broken bamboo tube.

Close by lay the body of the man who had done the deed. Brains and blood had oozed from the hole in the skull in which yet stuck the pointed end of the mattock sunk deep within.

Evidently the instrument had rebounded from the resilient surface of the bamboo.

A by-stander pointed to the tiny fracture near the hard knot of the staff. It was a small thing, but enough to destroy all the past labours.

Iémon went up to look at the body. "Why! 'Tis Goémon." To their questioning he told how Kamimura had called on the previous night, his rage at the inability of Iémon to aid him in distress.

With hanging heads, eyes on the ground, and wagging tongues, all departed to their homes. Later the body of Goémon was borne to his house by neighbors.

Iémon picked up the bamboo staff. Carrying it within he

placed it in a closet. It was as costly an object as the house had ever held. He was in despair.

It was on that very day, at 3pm, that Lady Hana heard a call at the door. "A request to make! A request to make!"

She recoiled from the sight presented. A beggar stood at the entrance of Tamiya.

A dirty mat wrapped around his body, feet and arms emerging

from bandages, making him like to some hideous insect with its carapace, his face wrapped in a towel, the effects of leprosy were hideously patent.

Said she in fear — "What do you here? There is naught to be had. Pray depart at once."

The answer was in tones the very harshness of which seemed to cause pain to the utterer — "The request is to Iémon Dono. Condescend to notify him."

With fearful glance Lady Hana shrank within, Iémon noted her nervous quivering.

Promptly he was on his feet — "A beggar has frightened Hana? Such are to be severely dealt with." He went to the entrance. "A beggar, and such a fellow? How comes it entrance has been had to the neighborhood? There is nothing for you here. If you would escape the dogs and bastinado, get you hence at once."

The man did not stir from the spot on which he stood.

Slowly he opened the mat held round his body, one of the coarse kind used to wrap round saké barrels. He was clothed in rags glued together by the foul discharges of his sores. He removed the towel from his face. The ghastly white and red blotches, the livid scars of the leper, the head with patches of scurfy hair ready to fall at a

touch, startled even Iémon the priest.

He would not have touched this man, expelled him by force, for all the past wealth of Tamiya.

The intruder noted the effect produced.

"To such has the wrath of Lady Iwa San brought this Chōbei. Does not Iémon, the one-time neighbor Kazuma, recognize Chōbei? And yet all comes through Iémon. Child, wife,

means of life, all these have failed Chōbei. In the jail robbed of everything, degenerate in mind and body, Chōbei has found refuge at nights in the booths of street vendors; on cold wet nights, even in the mouths of the filthy drains. Fortunate is he when fine weather sends him to rest on the river banks. To seek rest; not to find it. Lady Iwa stands beside him. When eyelids drowse Chōbei is aroused, to find her face close glaring into

his. Beg and implore, yet pardon there is none. 'Chōbei has a debt to pay to Iwa. In life Chōbei must repay by suffering; yet not what Iwa suffered. Think not to rest.' Some support was found in a daughter, sold in times past to the Yamadaya of Yoshiwara. There the child grew up to become the great profit of the house. The influence of the Kashiku was all powerful to secure entrance. For a night Chōbei was to find food and a bed. But that night came Kibei

San. He killed the Kashiku — crushed her out, as one would crush an insect. This Chōbei nearly died; but Kibei left him to the mercy of Lady Iwa. Her mercy!"

He would have thrown out his arms in weary gesture of despair. The pain and effort were too great. He moaned. "Last night Chōbei sought relief. Of late years the river has been spanned, for passers-by and solace of the human refuse.

Standing on Ryōgokubashi the dark waters of the river called to Chōbei as they swept strongly by to the sea. A moment, and all would be ended. About to leap hands were laid on Chōbei's shoulders. He was dragged back. Turning — lo! 'twas Lady Iwa San. Another creature, still fouler than she, with sloping eyelid, bald head, and savage look, stood by. Said Lady Iwa San — 'And Chōbei would end all — with luxury before his eyes!

Chōbei dies not but with the consent of Iwa. Get you to Yotsuya; to Iémon and Hana, living in luxury and Tamiya. Aid will not be refused you.' And so she brought me here. Deign to hear the prayer of Chōbei. Allow him to die in Yotsuya, upon the tatami; not on the bare earth, to be thrown on the moor for dogs to gnaw. Grant him burial in temple ground."

He changed his theme; the feeble quivering hands clasped

his belly. "Ah! This pinching hunger. Double is Chōbei's suffering; of mind and body. Apply for alms or food, and the leper is repulsed. See! Two fingers remain on this hand. Count of the rest fills out the tale for but one member. Frostbitten they were in the cold of night when this Chōbei could not feel them blacken. Lady Hana San, condescend a rice ball for this Chōbei. You, at least, know not the pinch of hunger.... Ah! She still

possesses some of that beauty and charm for which Iémon has brought ruin upon all."

Before the horrible lascivious leer of this object Lady Hana fled.

Left alone Iémon spoke. He had been thinking — "Chōbei has spoken well. From Iémon he is entitled to relief. Chōbei shall die on his mat. But in such shape nothing can be done. Get you hence. Buy clothing fit to appear before men's eyes. In

the bath wash that pus-laden body. Then come to Iémon. Relief shall be granted Chōbei."

Wrapping a ryō in paper he passed it to the leper. It was the last coin he possessed.

Lady Hana now returned with five or six rice balls savoured with salt. Fascinated, the two watched the horrible diseased stumps awkwardly shoving the food into the toothless mouth, cramming it in, and breaking it up so as not to lose the savour

of a grain. "Until to-morrow," said Chōbei. He picked up his stick.

In silence the man and woman watched him. Leaning on his bamboo staff he crawled away like some insect.

Lady Hana looked inquiringly at Iémon. He turned away his head.

Through the dusk Chōbei crawled across the Ryōgokubashi. The words of the

woman Lady Také had come true. He had a sense of being followed. He turned at the sound of footsteps.

At sight of a samurai in deep hat, mechanically he stretched out hands and self in the roadway, begging an alms.

The man drew apart, passing him in disgust and haste. Chōbei went on. He had no aim. It was with surprise that he found himself, as often of late,

on the embankment of the North Warigesui.

He looked down on the foul place of Lady Iwa's disappearance. "A foul ending; but after all an end. One night! One night's sleep! Deign, lady of Tamiya, to grant pardon and respite to Chōbei. Just one hour of sleep."

Carefully he adjusted his mat. Painfully he stretched himself out on it. "To die on the mat. Such was the word of Iémon."

He felt his rags. "It was well he agreed. Chōbei had other means to force compliance. Well, 'tis for later use."

A continued rustling aroused him. Some one was cautiously picking a way through the dry grass of the past winter, was creeping toward him. He half rose.

Seeing that concealment was no longer possible, the man rushed on him. Chōbei struggled to his feet, as one to fight for life.

"Life is dear. Why kill Chōbei the leper? Is he a test for some new sword? Deign to pardon. The flesh of the leper is too rotten. It defiles the weapon. Chōbei has been the samurai; he knows.... Ah! Respite there is none. 'Tis Iémon! Iémon of Tamiya would kill Chōbei!" He shouted and coupled the names in his despair.

Fearful of discovery, of being overheard, Iémon did not delay. The gleaming weapon

descended. The leper died quickly.

Standing over the body Iémon showed uncertainty. He had some thought of search; even bent down over it. But he could not touch those foul rags.

His nicety of feeling, almost womanlike — recoiled. Besides, what more had Iémon to do with the leper Chōbei. Their account was closed. Should he leave the body where it was? Recognition

might convey some danger, at least inconvenience.

He looked around for means to sink it in these waters, and yet not handle its repulsiveness.

A shōyu tub, old but fairly intact, lay upon the bank. It caught his eye. He rolled it up to the corpse.

[[HERE]] Gingerly he girdled the body of the dead man with his shoulder cord. Now tight fast it clasped the roundness of

the barrel. This he filled with stones, drove in the head, and with a shove sent it and its burden into the Warigesui. "That will hold him down. The rotten punk! Three days, and none could recognize him." Then he set off at rapid pace for Yotsuya.

CHAPTER 23: SANZUGAWA BRIDGELESS: THE FLOWERLESS ROAD TRAVERSED BY THE DEAD

It was 9pm, the Hour of the Pig, before Iémon reached the house in Yotsuya. To his surprise he found the amado still open on the garden. Some one was lying face downward on the rōka. It was Lady Hana. To his alarmed inquiry as to what was wrong she answered in the voice of one trying to suppress great pain.

"This Hana knows not. Opening a closet to get the spices used in preparing the meal, a rat sprang out. It scratched the face of Hana. Truly the pain is very great." She groaned, Iémon gently raised her. At the look on his face Lady Hana said — "There is a mirror in the toilet set. Deign to get it for Hana." He did not get it — this dower gift once of Lady Iwa — but tried to soothe her — "Let be: the wounds soon will heal. The pain will pass away." She shoved

him aside and ran to the toilet stand. She took the hand-mirror to the solitary lamp lighting the room. Aghast she contemplated her features. One side of the face was completely discoloured. It was a dark red, almost black, with the mark of five fingers plainly visible, as if a hand had struck her. No rat had made this wound. Lady Hana leaned over, her head resting almost on her knees. Iémon touched her shoulder — "Don't mind it. Truly the pain

will pass with dawn. Hana...." He drew back from the scowling madness in the face raised to him — "Sa! Sa! Iémon! Iémon! Easily did you get hold of all my property, to waste it on Lady Hana. 'Twas like grasping wet millet. Then, barbarous as you were, you sold me to the vile life of a street harlot. Ah! Vengeance!" In fright Iémon retreated. Lady Hana, taking herself to be Lady Iwa, all her madness had returned. She sprang up. Screens were beaten

and torn to pieces. With the heavy mirror she turned on him, seeking vengeance for her imagined wrongs. Iémon narrowly escaped injury as he dashed in to grapple with her. He succeeded in dragging her away from the lamp. Thus did this wild battle rage in the half dark room. The fictitious strength of the ill woman gave out. He held her on the floor, as one subdued. As she relapsed into a sleep, almost of unconsciousness, he ventured to

release her. Going to a closet he placed the mirror beside the bamboo stick; both hidden away.

All night he watched over her. Wearied out, with day he sought an aid readily given. The nurse, however, in alarm soon roused him. Lady Hana was raving madly in a high fever. The woman could not restrain her. Her cries were terrible, but not more so than the speech from her lips — "Lady Iwa, pardon! With the drugs of Suian this

Hana would palsy Lady Iwa's mind and body; poison the very springs of life, cut off all hope of issue. Ah! Vain the love of a man. All is granted him; body and goods. Iémon sells Hana for a street harlot. Out with him! Help!... Ah! Kwaiba aids — in all his rottenness. How horrible he is — huge vacant eye holes, the purple whitish flesh gnawed and eaten.... Ugh! He stinks!... Nay! 'Tis not Kwaiba. 'Tis Chōbei: Chōbei the leper, who would embrace this Hana. Iémon

comes. There is murder in his eye — for Hana to see, not Chōbei. Away! Away!... Again, there she comes!" She grasped the nurse's arm, and pointed to the just lighted lamp which barely relieved the shadows of the darkening night; was it the woman's imagination? By the light, dimly outlined; sat Lady Iwa San. Her hair hung down around face and body half turned aside. The bulging forehead, the puffed eyelids, were not to be mistaken. The

woman shook off the sick girl's hand and fled the house. Iémon did not try to prevent her. He was as one paralyzed. He, too, had seen, and was convinced.

To watch through the night was the task of the anxious and wearied man. In the day a yakunin had come, with formal notice to attend next day the office of Katada Tatéwaki Dono. His lordship had an inquiry to make. The summons was not to be disregarded, no matter what

his own exigencies. Lady Hana had dropped into a cataleptic state. As 1am approached he thought to clear brain and body by the rest of a few moments. His head had barely touched the pillow when sleep followed. The bell of Gwanshōji struck the hour. It roared and reverberated through Tamiya. Iémon awoke; an oppression like suffocation pervaded his whole body. Opening his eyes they stared into the wide white flat face of Lady Iwa. Her eyes were now

alive, darting gleams of fire deep from within the puffed and swollen lids. He felt her wild disordered hair sweeping his face as she swayed a little, still retaining her post and clutch on his bosom — "Iémon knows Iwa now! Hana knows Iwa now! Sworn to seize and kill both for seven births — come! Now it is that Iwa completes her vengeance." As she shook and pressed on him he came gradually out of his sleep. With a shout he cast her backwards.

Springing up he grasped the sword at his pillow. Madly he dealt blow after blow on the body before him. To the groans he replied by fresh blows.

An uproar without called him to himself. Don — don — don, don, don, don. There was knocking at the gate. Iémon hastily trimmed up the wick of the lamp. He leaned over the body. Lady Hana! The young man stooped over her, leaning on the gory sword. Great drops of cold

sweat stood out on his forehead. A shout came from without. "In his lordship's name! Open, or force will be used." Why had the summons for the day been anticipated? The unhappy ravings of Lady Hana flashed to his mind. Iémon no longer reasoned. A cunning insane light was in his eyes. Softly he made his way to the amado fronting on the garden. No one was without. In the rain and storm he might escape. Traversing the darkness he

noted, however, the man posted at the gate in the rear. Springing on the roof of the shed he looked over into Teramachi. It was deserted. With the bloody sword he hacked off the sharp points of the bamboo stakes. They now aided his flight over the wall. He cast the weapon aside. In a few minutes he disappeared in rapid flight down the street. When Katada Tatéwaki, accompanied by his men, at last broke down the stout resistance offered by

the outer door of Tamiya he found the house empty, except for the dead body of Lady Hana, lying in its pool of blood. She was still warm. He took it for mere murder, giving more urgent directions for immediate pursuit. Methodically he searched the house, down to the very rubbish pile. The seal of Tamiya was secured. This meant much. With sceptical smile he handled the broken bamboo stick found in a closet. He did

not show the discovery to his men.

Where did Iémon go? The unhappy man himself could not have told what happened in the intervening days. He came to consciousness in the darkness of a spring night, just before the dawn. The stars were beginning to pale in the East. The landscape had the livid eerie light in which it is uncertain whether day or night is to be the issue. With surprise Iémon

looked around him; then shuddered. The stagnant waters of Warigesui's filthy stream lay beneath him. He had found rest on the bank, at the very place where Chōbei had died under his hand.

"The Sanzugawa — without hills or bridges; On highway traversed by the dead, flowers there are none."

The yama (□) refers to Yamada Chōbei; the hashi (□) to Takahashi Iémon; the hana (□)

to Lady Hana, the wife of Iémon. Such was the then interpretation of the old poem.

Iémon could go no further. His course was run. He knew it; but how end life? At heart he was an arrant coward. Determined to cut belly he drew the dagger he had kept with him. A shudder went through him at sight of the steel. Ah! Better the green slime of the waters below. He thrust the blade back into its scabbard. Moodily standing and gazing

down, he gave an idle kick to a stone near by. Dislodged, it swayed, then rolled heavily down the bank, to plunge noisily into the stream, disturb its noisome depths. The effect was surprising. Following its course with his eye Iémon suddenly gave a yell of horror. Eyes starting from his head, arms raised high, he bent toward the stream. Hair standing on end he watched the hideous object rise to the surface. The face of Chōbei, purple and bloated, the

lips half gnawed and open in a fiendish grin, looked up at him. Down came the arms, and Iémon put hands over eyes to shut out the fearful vision. A horrid curiosity drove him again to view it. Was he mad? This time the barrel in its slow revolution brought to view the wide flat face, the bulging brow and heavy lids, the tangled, disordered hair of the drowned Lady Iwa. Scream after scream of the now frantic wretch rang in the air. These waters! Seek

death there! No! No! A thousand times — No! He turned to flee the place, but his legs refused the service. With fell purpose he ripped the blade from its scabbard, tore open his clothes to give the deadly thrust. As he raised the dagger invisible hands seized his arm. When he would release it, the other arm was seized. Everywhere these hands held him fast. He raged, tore, struggled madly to elude their

grasp. Then, overcome, he fainted.

Katada Tatéwaki from the top of the bank had been watching the struggle of his men. He came forward and looked down at the bound and helpless creature. "'Tis he: in very fact." On order a bamboo pole was fetched, and run between the bound hands and feet. Thus like some beast was Iémon conveyed to the nearest neighborhood office. The formalities were few and

soon over. To avoid chance of repetition of the scene they conveyed him as he was. Thus began the brutal progress across Edo in full daylight. People turned and stared after this escort of the man-beast. At a distance they took the burden as some savage bear, or perhaps one of those reputed "tanuki" so noxious in their pranks on humankind. Come closer it was seen to be a man. Any mad struggle to get free was treated to spear pricks applied with no

great nicety beyond the avoidance of serious injury. Violent as were his struggles at times, it is doubtful if they could have walked him the long distance. For the days of his flight he had never rested; nor had these men in his pursuit. Yet he was unexpected game. The Yotsuya affair was taking a widening sweep. Tamiya Yoémon and Kondō Rokurōbei were under examination. The death of a girl Lady Haru at the brothel of Toémon of Honjō had

unexpected effects. In the investigation which followed one of the women, Lady Také, had made full confession. The pedlar Mobei had never left the house of Toémon; never escaped from the hospitality of Lady Matsu. His goods had aroused her cupidity. The man died by poison, and was buried in the garden of Toémon's house. Lady Haru knew of the deed. This knowledge was the girl's destruction. The wife and her substitute Lady Kin hated Lady

Haru. Some remains of a first good looks, her youth, gave her power with the master of the house. The two women worked on his fears to gain consent for her destruction. A charge easily was trumped up, and she was dragged off to the cell of punishment. Under the hands of the wife and Lady Kin she suffered so that she died in three days, not without letting her mate Lady Také into the secret. Promptly the Honjō police were at work; not more

prompt than was the woman Lady Kin to disappear from Edo, almost a confession in itself. The rosary, found in the hands of the rector of the Reiganji, was easily traced through different mediators straight to Lady Matsu herself. The man Toémon held out, and died under the torture. The woman confessed; and in her confession was comprehended the full story of Lady Iwa's connection with Toémon's house. Of her no more need be said. She rotted and

died in the jail. The girls were scattered to kindred houses. Two of the women, hunting their pray on Warigesui toward the yashiki quarter, had witnessed the murder of Chōbei three nights before. The police had gone to secure the body. Tatéwaki Dono was notified and had accompanied them. To the surprise of all Iémon, then the object of earnest search, was found on the spot.

The affair kept on spreading — to the very source of all these troubles. Katada Tatéwaki in the course of procedure had transmitted the Tamiya case to the jurisdiction of the machibugyō of the North district of Edo town, Homma Iga no Kami. With greatest interest the two men in company poured over the innumerable documents now piling up in the case. Old Tamiya Yoémon proved easy game. He readily confessed all he knew. This

brought in many witnesses from the wardsmen. It was not exactly what was wanted. The evidence was mostly mere hearsay and conjecture. In those days such testimony had a value not far below that of direct statement. All pointed the way to the real criminal, who after all was the star witness. Against Yoémon at first there was but little. However, in his rage against Iémon and Kondō Rokurōbei — Akiyama was out of his reach — his tongue was

too long. The faces of the magistrates grew serious as his connection with the money lender Suzuki was made plain. A samurai loaning money on interest! and pressing men to ruin for payment!! The stingy avaricious Yoémon appeared behind the usurer — until in time his own heavy losses had made him a borrower, and placed him in the hands of his once partner. Yoémon, together with the conspirators, was not allowed to participate in the

forced restitution made by Suzuki. Nevertheless, at the time no great severity was shown the old man. He was remanded to the custody of his bail, to be kept confined to one room in the house.

The same leniency was shown toward Rokurōbei. When he showed a disposition to be recalcitrant, to equivocate, Homma gave sign to the dōshin. Quickly the scourgers came forward with their fearful

instrument, the madaké. Made of bamboo split into long narrow strips, these tightly wrapped in twisted hempen cord to the thickness of a inch, with the convenient leverage of a couple of feet, the mere sight brought Kondō to terms. As he entered he had seen them lead away a commoner who had undergone the punishment. The man's back, a mass of bruised and bleeding flesh, was vivid to mind. At once he prostrated himself; made full confession. At

last they were at the source. Kondō was a witness of the fact. He could and did tell of the inception and progress of the whole plot against Lady Iwa San, the source of untold woe to Yotsuya. His story covered the period from the entrance of Iémon into the neighborhood up to the discovery of the body of Kamimura Goémon. The rôle played by Kazaguruma Chōbei was in part dark to him. Of the disposition of Lady Iwa to the Honjō master of the Yōtaka he

pleaded ignorance. Tatéwaki Dono smiled as he counselled indulgence on this point. He knew.

Kondō, however, was sent back to the jail. He was unquestionably a principal. At last it was the turn of Iémon. The weeks had passed. The body had been carefully nursed back to vigour. The mind was in lamentable state. The ill-meant efforts of the jail authorities, the strengthening of the criminal in

order better to endure the torture to the confession point, were somewhat baffled by the nightly visions of the wretched man. The two hags, Lady Iwa and Lady Mino; Chōbei in his final stage of purple bloatedness; these were his nightly companions, to torment and harass him. Sleep! If he could but close his eyes to shut out these horrors! Instead they became more vivid. The jailors put him at the farthest corner of their ample premises. His fellow

prisoners, such as were allowed daily exit to the yard, visited him with blows and foul insults for the disturbance he created in the night. But he was cunning withal. Trapped as he was, in his lucid moments he realized that there could be but little against him. Lady Iwa? Not even in Tokugawa times was the supernatural cause of prosecution except at the hands of the vulgar. Nor in those days, any more than in these of Taishō nengo, was a wife legally

protected against abuse of husband or parents-in-law. As for Chōbei — he was dead. His own presence on the scene was no evidence against him as murderer. His only misgivings on that point lay in the confusion of mind as to the few days then covered. But who would blame a samurai for testing his blade on a beggar? What were beggars for? He knew nothing of the evidence given by Yoémon and Kondō; of the vile proof in the hands of

Katada Dono. He had wholly forgotten the nurse who had listened to the wild ravings of Lady Hana in her illness, broken sentences bearing so heavily and dove-tailing so nicely into the completed case. Owing to this woman Tatéwaki Dono had not waited the appearance of Iémon at morning. Iémon also left out of account the characters of the two men before whom he appeared. Iga no Kami sat as judge in the case. Close beside him, a little

in the rear, sat Katada Tatéwaki, in whose jurisdiction the case had originated, and who was familiar with every stage. The four dōshin sat to one side and the other of these two men.

Homma and Katada were typical of their caste. Cold, callous, cruel, devoted rigidly to the formulæ; of the samurai code, with strange exceptions granted to the virtues required of the common people — filial conduct and unswerving obedience to a

superior — they were not men likely to regard with favour this intruder into their class. The name of samurai had been brought into contempt. Hence the serious character of the offence, the necessity of severest scrutiny. To the valued suggestion of Tatéwaki, Iga no Kami nodded assent. Iémon thought of nothing but the murder of Chōbei, the abuse of his wife Lady Iwa, the conspiracy against her life and honour. The first question

paralyzed his defence. Was he not the son of Takahashi Daihachirō? The whole terrible vista of the consequences of avowal appeared before him, once himself a dōshin and familiar with legal procedure. The family had suffered deprivation of rights. It had been degraded from the caste. Properly speaking Iémon was an intruder into the samurai class. He was an impostor. His offence was against the suzerain lord, the Shōgun. All the terrible

penalties of treason hung over him. Tatéwaki had been quick to note the opportunity to take this case out of the category of offence by a samurai. Iémon was a plebeian and a charlatan. He had insulted Government. At the stumbling denial quick order was given. A yakunin seized the rope and dragged down the head of Iémon. Others held him at the sides, to maintain the body rigid. Stout fellows, the pick of the jailors, came forward. With ferocious

regularity the blows fell. Welts at once appeared. Soon the blood was trickling from the torn skin. There was no sign to mitigate the severity of the infliction. When at the seventieth blow the body collapsed in a faint the wretched man was a terrible sight. The attendants of the jail, witnesses of the full punishment of double the number of stripes, had rarely seen such severity exercised. The jailors hated this smooth fellow, this disturber of

their peace. They kept a jail, not a madhouse. Their superiors showed no sign of the mercy of renewed questioning. Hence they would change the mad nightly ravings to the subdued groans of the punished.

The days passed and his body had healed, though movement caused pain and distress. Brought again before the judges at the very sight of the scourges he screamed out confession. Questioned as to the conspiracy

against the caste, his fraudulent attempt to consummate marriage with a samurai woman — the actual fact or legality of it was ignored — his ill-treatment and sale of her; all these in terror he denied. Once he had looked upon banishment from Edo as the limit of his punishment. Now decapitation would be a merciful end. He strove to secure the favour of a quick and painless death. Again he was beaten almost to a jelly. He clung to his denial, so

important was the issue. At the next appearance he was seized and dragged to a post fixed in the ground not far from the judge's seat. His knees were pressed down on the edges of the triangular bars. These formed a sort of grid, the edges of the bars being just enough blunted to avoid cutting the skin. None of the pain was spared, yet the prisoner remained fit for early future torture. The granite slabs were then piled on his knees. Each

one weighed 107 lbs. As the fifth slab was placed on the body of Iémon, the flesh assumed a reddish tint from the impeded circulation. Froth stained his mouth, mucus ran from his nose. A sixth, a seventh stone, were placed. "How now! How now!" The men pressed heavily on the stones. A dōshin bent over him, listening and waiting for sign of the important confession. The criminal was the one important witness of Tokugawa penal law. Without

confession he was innocent beyond all other proof. As the eighth stone was placed Iémon began to vomit blood. The doctor raised his hand. The feet were showing signs of blackness, which rapidly spread upward. The man was in a dead faint. No confession had been secured.

Perhaps the examination was thus conducted out of some severity. Days passed. Whether or not the report of the

physician was unfavourable, influenced by some means Homma had fear the man might die before a public retribution was secured. When Iémon again was dragged before his judges he had a terrible object lesson before him. A man was undergoing the torture of the lobster. Hands drawn up behind to the shoulders, the feet tightly bound across the chest, he was propped up on a mat. Properly conducted this "effort to persuade" took place in the jail.

Homma wished to try the effect of anticipation on Iémon. The prisoner looked quickly at the man under torture, then hung down his head. His lips were twitching with uncertainty. Homma struck hard — "Why deny the plain fact? Is justice so ignorant of the doings and whereabouts of a scamp. Kichitarō, or Kazuma the diviner, as he called himself, murders Chōbei the pimp; a deed carried out before witnesses." A dōshin placed the

document of the confession of the whores so that Iémon had no difficulty in ascertaining its title. "And why? Because of the agreement with Chōbei to sell the woman he dared to call his wife. The proof? The seal of Tamiya, the document itself." At last Iémon looked up. The dōshin placed under his eyes the fatal contract with Chōbei — agreement of exchange of the body of the woman in return for five ryō duly received. It had been recovered from the dead

pimp's corpse. Carefully wrapped in oiled paper, Chōbei had carried it — sewn in what he called his dress. Iémon unwilling to recognize past services, Chōbei was sure to find it useful. Truly Iémon was young and impatient, and Chōbei was double his age. With bitterness the survivor recognized this primal fact.

Iémon's eyes wandered from the paper to the thief under torture. The dark green of the body was

rapidly changing. The doctor present gave a quick frightened sign. Skilful hands at once cast loose the bonds. Over toppled the body. Iémon noted the white, almost livid, colour of death. Restoratives were applied. All were busied with bringing the man back to life. Then he was carried off, expression so unlike that of a human being that the less hardened shuddered. Said Homma — "No confession yet?" He raised his hand to make a

sign. Iémon knew the quickness of response. He almost screamed his appeal for further respite. The Law had triumphed. As Iémon put his thumb seal to the confession of guilt to insolence the magistrates rose and disappeared. "Futodoki" — they and he knew that it meant the death sentence.

Judgment was not delayed. The next day Homma, with Katada and an officer of the Shōgun's

household present, gave sentence. Yoémon and Rokurōbei glared hate at Iémon who squatted with head bent to the ground. The sword — that now was his only hope. The first words of Homma showed that no mercy was to be dealt out in this case. Suzuki the plebeian merely suffered stripes and banishment from Edo. He had to make restitution to the amount of his property — such as was left after paying the huge fine to Government. Tamiya Yoémon

and Kondō Rokurōbei underwent degradation from the caste. There was no disposition to overlook the offence of usury. Beggary was to be the portion of Yoémon, the destitution of the outcast. For some years the senile old man, the virago of a woman once the wife of Kondō Rokurōbei, were stationed at the Niōmon, to attract and amuse the worshippers passing up to the great temple of the Asakusa Kwannon. Not for long could the

woman hold her tongue. Abuse passed with the sun's height to blows, and the by-standers had to interfere and rescue the old man from the severe beating. It was to the profit, rather than disadvantage, of the temple. The pair were an added attraction. The priests left interference to those at hand. Then the old man disappeared; to ornament the highway with his corpse, or be cast on the moor, food for dogs and crows. Such probably was the end of

Tamiya Yoémon. The woman had not been seen for some months. Her abilities as scold had attracted those qualified to judge; her transfer to the position of bawd in a low-class house of the neighboring Yoshiwara soon followed.

Kondō Rokurōbei fared tolerably well, considering his deserts. His confession had been a great aid in unravelling the case. He was not sentenced to cut belly. Degraded he heard with dismay

the sentence of deportation and exile to the far distant island of Sado. At this savage place, subject to the hell of a Siberian winter and the intense heats of the summer, the once pampered man lived out his last days, few and evil. He who had passed the time idling with tea-cup, or go, or flower arrangement, and taking enjoyment in the freshness and coolness of his garden at the Yotsuyazaka, at fifty years now tried to lead the hard and dangerous life of the

wild fishing population among whom he was unceremoniously cast. Such life was soon forbidden him. He was but in the road. Then he did such clerical duties as the village at times needed. A wife even was provided for him. The final blow was a palsy, cutting off all effort at making a livelihood. Beatings now took the place of food. The villagers laughed when they heard of the old man's fall from a cliff. They, too, would have acted as had the brothers of

Miss Stew Pan. They took the word for the deed; and at the cliff foot near Negai they erected a wooden shrine to propitiate the spirit of "Jiya Rokurō."

The day of execution had come. When sentenced, bound as he was Iémon struggled forward to plead for mercy, respite from the barbarous punishment to be inflicted on the traitor. His reward was the cangue and bamboo saw — nokogirihiki;

failing death by this, he was to be crucified. The attendants fell on him. Kicks and blows had little effect on the man frantic with terror. He almost reached the rōka at which sat Homma. Then madly struggling he was carried off to the jail. Said a dōshin — "His antics in the cangue will find small scope." The last clause of the sentence was due to the notorious unwillingness of any passer-by to give a cut. The punishment had lapsed since the days of the

third Shōgun, and was no more successful in Iémon's case. Placed in the cangue at the execution ground of Shinagawa a cut was made in each side of his neck. Smeared with blood the bamboo saw was placed on the cangue in inviting proximity to the head. For five hours people passed, with curious glances, but no movement to release the criminal. An Eta burakumin butcher sidled up. The guards watched him with curiosity. Picking up the saw he

made one pass. At the yell given by Iémon he dropped the implement and fled in terror, amid the laughter of guards and by-standers. Toward 1pm, the Hour of the Sheep, a yoriki with his dōshin appeared. On signal the cangue was removed. Inert limbs feebly twitching Iémon was bound tight to the double cross, his legs and arms stretched wide apart. This was raised, and again the hours passed in miserable waiting for a death which seemed to

recede. If unconsciousness threatened he was given vinegar to drink as restorative. His fevered lips eagerly sought the fluid and prolonged his torture. In the spring light the days were long. As the sun was about to set the officer gave command. A dōshin came forward to the cross and made a sign. A guard thrust his spear upward into the belly of Iémon. The limbs made a movement, as in attempt to be drawn up. A guard on the other side in turn

made a thrust. Others followed. For some moments they continued their sport, the reward of long waiting. The man was not yet dead. Impatient the dōshin gave the shaft of a spear a violent upward thrust. Its point appeared through the left shoulder. The head fell forward on the breast and hung limp. Iémon was dead.

These events could not be let pass without notice from either the pious or the timorous. 3rd April, 1717 the Inari shrine built to propitiate the fearful Lady of Tamiya was opened to worship with due ceremonies. It had been erected on the ground of the house once occupied by Matazaémon, facing on Teramachi and on the narrow street paralleling Samonchō to the East. It was almost opposite the entrance to the Shōgwanji.

At the family temple, the Myōgyōji, on the Samégabashi side, a grave and stela was set up. With time, however, the opposition made itself felt. It was asserted that the Lady Iwa still walked the neighborhood, inflicting pains and penalties on the inhabitants thereof. Triumphant reference was made to recent public disasters — of plague, pestilence, famine, and tax levies. The shrine was invitation for her presence. People had grown indifferent as

the new paint grew old, then shabby on the once famous miya. Success lay with the opposition, and abolition of shrine and grave was easily enforced. It was but for a time. The neighborhood was either equally, or more, unfortunate without the protection of its tutelary Inari shrine. Just when it was re-established cannot be stated, but in the late eighteenth century it was most flourishing. It was a favourite resort of samurai women,

seeking consolation for unfaithful or brutal conduct of their husbands, and strength in the reputation for chastity of the famous Lady of Tamiya. In 1825 the third Kikugorō made Yotsuya famous by his presentation of the "Yotsuya Kwaidan" as written for the stage by Tsuruya Namboku (Katsu Byōzō). In the first years of the Meiji restoration period Shunkintei Ryuō, the famous story-teller, heralded its renown in the Shin Yoshiwara. Lady Iwa

San became a feature of the Konharukō fête of that quarter. A grave was again erected to her at the Myōgyōji. As she had no kaimyō, or posthumous name, the rector of the temple gave her that of "Tokushō-In Myōnen Hishō Daishi," which can be interpreted — "She, pleasing of disposition and earnest in prayer; a woman of greatest brilliance." Let the reader not judge this composition harshly; or its truth.

The editor to the reproduction of Ryuō's story speaks of his difficulties. Placed in his hand for judgment he saw at once the power of the tale. But — how avoid incurring the divine anger of the Yotsuya Inari; how avoid being charged with the divine punishment? This question was solved by the publisher assuming the burden of both inflictions; under the spur of what he regarded as publication in inferior and untrue form. He answered these questions with a

laugh — "Afraid? Not so: I, too, am human. Though the unusual is an object, yet I would not rejoice at incurring the divine anger by publishing what should not be published. Though the divine anger be incurred by publishing the Yotsuya Kwaidan, and the divine punishment be inflicted, yet who would not gladden the eyes and ears of the land? Hence in haste the true record is to be printed; owing to emission of unfounded stories. The true record being put forth,

the people profit by it. How then is the divine wrath incurred by publication? Certainly not: the protection of the divine one is secured." The editor trusted in his argument; as does the present scribe.

More than once the remark has been heard as to these shrines of Nippon — "Their temples? Those dirty, shabby places, without architecture or interest, the haunts of snotty, ragged children?" The sun-helmeted

gentleman and lady, or collection of their kind, rush them by in haughty contempt, and with some ridicule and ridiculous comment. Good Sir and Madame, you are passing history on the road. At this Kwōgwanji, in its rather shabby guest hall, Kusonoki Masashige and his devoted followers spoke their last defiance and then cut belly. Kobé? It is noted as a place to take ship, and not be too long in doing so. This other, barely a mile from the Tōkyō-

Yokohama railway, is contemporary record of Nitta Yoshioka, who carved his bloody protest on the Ashikaga before he killed himself in the trap set by their treachery at this spot. Here behind the Kōraiji near Oiso is a very shabby and tiny shrine nestled at the foot of the cliff. This had better be avoided. It is dedicated to the smallpox god. But more than history is neglected in the indifference and contempt shown these minor miya. A vein of thought

inwoven into the minds of this strange people is instanced by this modest shrine of the Tamiya Inari. Wandering along the amusement quarter of some great city, a theatre is seen with a torii gorgeous in its red paint standing before the entrance. Within this entrance is a small shrine and a box for the practical offerings of cash or commodities. The theatre is decorated inside and outside with flags as for a festival. Such is actually in progress. The

representation is that of the Yotsuya Kwaidan. From manager and actor (even in the presentation of the figured screen of the moving picture) the malevolence of the Lady Iwa Inari — the Fox-Witch Lady Iwa — is to be averted. Hence all the signs of worship as at her very shrine; hence the unwillingness of author or publisher to handle the story, at least in its full form. This is but a remnant of the fear of "black magic" still found and practised in Nippon. On the

beach at Kamakura at times can be found straw chaplets with gaudy cloth attached to the centre; a copper coin, and rice offering are accompaniments. Or such will be found at the crossroads of town or village, or on the Yokohama Bluff. Or in times of epidemic in numbers they are laid on the wayside shrine of the god of measles or other disease. The latter disposition conveys its own warning; the others are majinai or charms by which it is hoped

to transfer the disease to some other child, thus insuring the cure of the first sufferer. The coin has been rubbed on the body of the little patient. Dogs usually dispose of the food offering; and passing children are only too likely to pick up the nefarious coin. The road cleaner comes along at his rare intervals and sweeps the chaplet into the hole for refuse. It is to be regretted that the ignorance and malevolence indicated by these charms

cannot as easily be gathered in and disposed of. With these remarks the Yotsuya Kwaidan and its tale of ill-fortune is brought to an end.

Yokohama,
5th June-4th July,
1916.

The end.

Bancho Sarayashiki

Bancho Sarayashiki a Japanese folk tale, translated by computer.

Not edited yet.

One “Well, the cherry blossoms have bloomed splendidly.” A young samurai who appeared to be twenty-four or twenty-five stood on the stone steps of Sannō Shrine in Kōjimachi, gazing up at the cloud of blossoms that seemed ready to come crashing down upon his head. He wore a deep woven hat, carried white-hilted swords at his side, wrapped a fashionable dashing cloak

around his waist, and wore his hakama trousers with a high crotch. Behind him swaggered two fearsome retainers with sickle-shaped beards, their imposing presence rivaling even Sannō’s great torii gate as they followed.

Following their master’s words, one of the retainers shouted. “It looks just like artificial flowers." “If one were to tear apart red Tanabata streamers and scatter them all at once around here, I

reckon it’d look just like this.” "You sure come up with complicated stuff," the other retainer bellowed with a loud laugh. "Just say it looks like festival-eaves decorations in one go." “Ha ha ha ha!” While exchanging idle banter, the three of them descended the long stone steps and took seats at a tea shop beneath a large cherry tree that beckoned to customers. At the tea shop sat two prior customers. Both men wore long swords thrust into

their belts; one ostentatiously exposed his bulldog-like face to the radiant sunlight. The other wore a ceramic-pot-shaped hood. The two men glared at the three newcomers who had just entered, then exchanged meaningful nods.

As if paying no heed to that, the samurai and his retainers were leisurely drinking their tea. In mid-March of the first year of Meireki,1655, the spring sun — already past 2PM, the Hour of

the Monkey — slid across the tea shop’s shallow eaves, casting black cherry blossom shadows at their feet.

“Hey, Miss! Bring us another cup over here.” “Bring us another cup over here,” barked the bulldog-faced man. A demand for tea. The tea shop girl promptly poured tea and brought it over, whereupon he pressed the bowl to his lips and exaggeratedly wrinkled his nose. “Whoa, this’s scalding!”

“It’s like you dragged this straight from Tengu’s realm — my drinking tea turns to flames!” “This’s unbearable, I tell ya!” He shouted as though he couldn’t bear it any longer and splattered the tea from the bowl at the samurai’s feet with a wet slap. Because it looked so obviously staged, the retainers rather than their samurai master all sprang up at once.

“You insolent bastard! What’s the meaning of dumping tea

before us?” “Don’t look like amateurs, do ya? Tryin’ to pick a fight, you bastards?” The other side had clearly been waiting for this confrontation. Even when roared at by the demonic pair, the two men stood their ground without blinking. They smirked and put on airs of indifference. “Whether I’m sellin’ or not’s my business. Don’t wanna buy? Then don’t.”

“This isn’t a scene for penny-pinching scum to meddle in.

Stay back. We’ve got no business dealing with the likes of you.”

“So you deign to take on the likes of us?”

The samurai removed his woven hat with a flourish. He was a samurai of refined character — fair-skinned, large-eyed, with the faint bluish shadow of a beard — a truly manly and splendid figure. "You pick fights without cause! It’s precisely

because rootless scoundrels like you infest all 880 districts that His Excellency’s capital grows restless," he declared, turning to glare at his opponent’s face.

The fact that the bulldog-faced group had harbored an ulterior motive from the very beginning to pick a fight with this samurai was further proven by what followed.

Besides the bulldog-faced man and the pot-hooded one, three

more companions had been following behind the samurai party, watching from beneath the cherry blossoms since earlier. From their midst emerged a man around thirty who appeared to be their leader, striding boldly between the opposing groups. "A rabid cur that bites without cause? We ain't got none of those in Edo," he said with a derisive sidelong glance at the samurai. "The so-called Shirahata Group that goes round bullying townsfolk

— you'd be Lord Aoyama Harima, samurai comrade of Mizuno Jūrōzaemon himself. That's you right enough."

As his assessment concluded, this young samurai was Aoyama Harima — a 700-koku hatamoto who maintained a mansion in Banchō. That he belonged to the Shirahata Group under Mizuno Jūrōzaemon could be discerned from the white hilts of his daishō swords. Given the need to advance events, there was no

time here to detail the Shirahata Group’s origins — nor any need to do so. Let it simply be noted that factions like the Shirahata and Jingi Groups, formed from hatamoto samurai, had long been locked in standoffs with the so-called machiyakko: townsman-vigilante gangs. This mutual animosity had deepened since that New Year’s clash at Kobikicho’s Yamamura-za theater gate, where Mizuno’s group and Banzuin Chōbei’s

machiyakko had collided over trifles — the root of their present enmity.

At that very moment, Aoyama Harima brought along two retainers named Gonji and Gonroku; since this morning, they had visited a relative of the Aoyama family, been treated to a midday meal there, and on their way back had come to visit Sannō Shrine while cherry blossom viewing. At that very moment, Banzuin Chōbei’s

underlings happened to arrive for worship as well. Among them, Hanaregoma Shirōbei — recognized as their senior leader — stepped forward to provoke a quarrel with the Shirahata Group’s young samurai and his retainers. Harima was not one to quietly sidestep a fight that was being picked. Especially since they were challenging him to a fight knowing full well he was Aoyama Harima of the Shirahata Group, he naturally

had no reservations about confronting them.

“Since you knew I was one of the Shirahata Group and still picked a fight — then you lot must be underlings of Hanakawado’s Banzuin Chōbei.” When questioned, Shirōbei stated his name. In keeping with machiyakko custom of this era, the others also proudly announced their names one by one: Namiki no Chōkichi, Hashiba no Nisuke, Shōten no

Manzō, and Tamachi no Yasaku. By this point, both factions had reached a juncture where they could no longer part peacefully. Harima faced the white-hilted daishō, his retainers confronted the sickle-bearded foes, while their opponent Shirōbei squared off against the golden square handguards and plum-blossom-engraved finger — none would yield an inch. Moreover, these adversaries had come seeking conflict from the outset. Harima, who loathed defensive

postures, gripped his sword hilt with wildfire eyes, whereupon his retainers — emulating their master — threw back their bull-necks and roared.

“Hey, hey, you lot! You lowly townsmen daring to defy the esteemed hatamoto — puny gnats who don’t know your place! If you’re so desperate to sell a fight, no need to beg our Master — we’ll buy it off you at a fair price!” “Lucky today ain’t no lord’s death anniversary —

makes it prime slaughterin’ weather. Just picture it: us mountain-hand ruffians grabbin’ them downtown eels dragged up here and plantin’ every last one in Tameike Pond’s mud.”

Shirōbei refused to back down. “If we were the sort to tuck our tails and run from such threats, we wouldn’t have climbed up to the mountain-hand where your Shirahata Group nests just to pick a fight. Before we dump you lot into Tameike Pond, you’d

better steel yourselves not to end up as Sannō's tied monkey charms — offerings for the shrine brats!" Provoked by their mockery, Harima grew all the more impatient. "We had long intended to punish Banzuin Chōbei for opposing Lord Mizuno — the leader we revere — with his endless disrespect. But now that you underlings deliberately provoke a fight, we shall show no mercy. As you wish — Aoyama Harima himself will personally take you on."

“That’s quite the resolve. Don’t you dare run away,” Shirōbei sneered again. “What nonsense!” Harima was now blazing like wildfire. He sprang up as if kicking over the camp stool and loosened his sword in its scabbard. Gonji and Gonroku also drew their straight-bladed swords. The opponents also drew their swords without delay.

Though such brawls were

hardly uncommon in this era, having blades recklessly brandished before one’s shop was nothing short of a nuisance. Yet the teahouse woman, who knew no way to quell this disturbance, could only pace restlessly while keeping watch on how things unfolded — when a woman’s palanquin, its studded metal fittings glinting in the spring sunlight, came hastening up to the stone steps below. The rikisha men unloaded the palanquin into the

heart of the brawl without even wiping the sweat from their brows, and two young attendants — having hitched up their hakama trouser legs — took positions flanking it on either side. “Wait, wait!” shouted the young attendants. Even in the midst of their desperate fight, Gonji and Gonroku immediately recognized the faces of those young attendants.

“Oh! That’s Lady Shibukawa’s

palanquin!” When an obstruction was thrown into the heart of the brawl, even the machiyakko crowd hesitated momentarily. The palanquin door slid open smoothly, revealing an elderly woman — appearing over fifty — dressed in a katabira robe. Having quietly put on the sandals adjusted by the palanquin bearers, she first fixed a piercing gaze at one side of the quarreling parties. The one being scrutinized was Harima.

He hurriedly bowed. “Oh! Aunt of Shibukawa, what brings you here…” “On my return from Buddhist prayers at our family temple in Akasaka, I happened upon this timely scene.” “For a hatamoto who should uphold the realm’s dignity to brawl daily with townsman riffraff over petty squabbles — what exemplary conduct.” “The advice I’ve daily impressed upon you falls on your wild horse ears like sutra chants! As the master behaves, so follow his retainers

— Gonji! Gonroku! You lot take your mischief too far!”

Crushed beneath the stately authority of this woman who could outmatch any man, even the demon-like bearded retainers ended up cowering with their heads in their hands. Harima also listened in silence with a troubled look. The elderly woman was Harima’s aunt — Mayumi, mother of Shibukawa Iorinosuke, who maintained a 1,200-koku estate in

Koishikawa. When Harima came of age, he lost his father and then his mother, leaving this elderly woman — his mother's elder sister — as his only true relative. The Shibukawa were a distinguished house whose ancestor So-and-so had met a glorious end in the Battle of Mikatagahara's retreat. The present head, Iorinosuke, was a young man nearly the same age as his cousin Harima, but his mother Mayumi — who served as his guardian — was a woman

of robust temperament, nurtured by the admirable Shibukawa family traditions. Moreover, since she was both his late mother’s elder sister and a senior relative of higher standing, even the stubborn Harima could not snort like a wild horse before this aunt. He was meekly being scolded.

However, this concerned only the relationship between Harima and his aunt; it held no relevance for the opposing

party.

Shirōbei said impatiently. “From what I observe, you appear to be an esteemed lady of noble standing — but what could be your purpose in coming into this brawl’s midst? Do you mean to somehow settle this dispute?” “Or if you’re merely spectating, might you step back a bit further?”

“Though I may not know the justification for my interference,

would you not entrust this quarrel to me?” said Mayumi quietly. “I will reprimand Harima severely afterward.” “Now, I ask for your forbearance — please withdraw.” “Well…” Shirōbei paused to consider for a moment.

“If you remain unwilling, I shall not press the matter further.” “Yet having intervened thus, should you refuse compliance and force me to oppose you, this

too follows the samurai house’s ways — there can be no alternative.” With this decisive declaration, Shirōbei found himself increasingly cornered. Even were she a samurai woman, a man of Shirōbei’s standing — renowned even among machiyakko — could hardly brawl physically with a woman. Victory here would bring no glory. Clashes with the Shirahata Group had always been spontaneous affairs, hardly unique to this day. Realizing

there might be wisdom in withdrawing obediently to preserve the elderly woman’s dignity, he gracefully conceded.

“In deference to your excellency’s handling of this matter, we shall take our leave today.” “You have listened well,” Mayumi said with evident satisfaction. “Then would you withdraw peaceably?” “My deepest apologies for the disturbance.” The samurai matriarch and the machiyakko

leader exchanged formal bows before parting. Following Shirōbei’s lead, all his underlings withdrew without protest. In the wake of this human tempest, an abrupt hush descended — only the sight of cherry blossom petals drifting soundlessly downward now held sway.

“Harima,” Mayumi said, turning to face her nephew. “This is a public thoroughfare. I shall explain the details when you

come to the mansion, but for a samurai to imitate machiyakko riffraff — even hearing names like Shirahata Group and Shingi Group turns my stomach. This has nothing to do with some inescapable martial pride or obligation — you brawl simply because you find it entertaining. How could that ever serve as a model for samurai? You must renounce this brawling business of ruffians by day’s end. Refuse, and Aunt will disown you. Do you understand?”

No matter what was said, Harima found this aunt difficult to handle. Having seemingly resigned himself to the futility of resistance, he submitted meekly before her. Mayumi’s katabira-clad figure soon disappeared back into the palanquin, which was then borne quietly toward Kōjimachi — leaving behind the retainers who stood dazed, as though their very livers had been ripped out.

Seeing off that retreating figure, the master and servants who had been crouching until now exchanged looks in relief. Then they burst into loud laughter all at once.

Two “I am the mother of the maid Okiyo.” “Please allow me to see my daughter.”

Before long, a woman who looked about thirty-seven or thirty-eight but appeared older

than her years stood at the kitchen entrance of Aoyama Harima’s mansion in Banchō and humbly requested entry, whereupon the maid Osen emerged from within. “Ah, Mother of Okiyo?” “You’ve come.”

While Osen went to call Okiyo, Okiyo’s mother sat waiting on the kitchen threshold. A seven-hundred-koku estate would normally command an imposing mansion, yet its master Harima

remained young and unwed. The household’s sole administrator was steward Shibata Jūdayū — a hereditary vassal of proven loyalty, yet also an elderly bachelor of naturally indifferent disposition. Beyond these were two young retainers named Tetsunojō and Yagorō; two servants called Gonji and Gonroku; and gatekeeper Yojibē — seven men in total across high and low ranks. These demonic youths and underlings would cluster together to cook

three daily meals and even handle dusting. They took pride in this Mikawa-style austerity until receiving reproof from Aunt Shibukawa. However much their frugality might be deemed ancestral tradition from Mikawa days, every mansion requires decorum befitting its station. In such peaceful times as these, maintaining constant battlefield living conditions would hardly do. With only rough men about, mansion upkeep suffered — not to

mention inconveniencing visiting guests. Given their grand estate’s stature, it stood argued they must employ at least two or three proper female staff members.

Harima declared that keeping half-hearted women in the Aoyama mansion — a household that prioritized martial prowess — was nothing but trouble. Yet between his formidable aunt’s insistence — which he found deeply uncomfortable — and

Jūdayū’s counsel that opposing her would be unwise, Harima reluctantly agreed to hire two women as a token gesture. They summoned a woman named Osen from their domain’s fief to work in the kitchen, while for personal attendance on the master, they employed a girl from Edo — Okiyo, born in Yotsuya near Banchō — who had entered the mansion in the autumn two years prior. She was the only daughter of the mother now come visiting.

Osen, who worked in the kitchen, was honest, while Okiyo, the lady’s maid, worked diligently and attentively. With both servants proving to be excellent additions, Aunt Shibukawa would periodically come to inspect and offer praise. Indeed, compared to when Okiyo first came for her interview, the mansion’s interior had grown considerably cleaner. The kitchen in particular had become unrecognizably well-

ordered. When Okiyo’s interview concluded and her mother came to deliver her belongings, even she found herself inwardly taken aback. In a mansion of such standing, the only woman was Osen in the kitchen; all others were rough men who looked like they’d eat dog meat without hesitation. Though the lord carried himself with refined dignity, his eyes gleamed with a sharpness that hinted at a volatile temper. Sending her young only

daughter to live in such a ramshackle mansion — like some demon-haunted island — filled her with unease, but with the interview settled and both parties agreed, her mother could only formalize the master-servant contract before the steward and depart.

Three full years had since passed. Both the lord and his retainers were fond of brawling. Members of the Shirahata Group came and went

frequently. Yet beneath their rough exteriors, each carried tender tears within. Though making a trade of prowling for fights might sound fearsome, people said it served to awaken a society grown complacent. So long as she kept this reasoning close and faithfully served while understanding their temperament, Okiyo found nothing particularly difficult about her duties. She had told her mother that serving in this mansion felt more comfortable

than working in households where many feigned docility while nursing ill intentions beneath.

Even so, as a mother, she still harbored some unease. The Shirahata Group’s brawls seemed to grow increasingly violent, and each time Okiyo’s mother heard rumors of them wherever she went, her heart ached. The kind of ruffian who swaggered through Edo’s streets flaunting white-hilted

swords was her daughter’s master. Of course, even if the master were to commit some misdeed, it seemed unlikely the female servants would be involved — yet she couldn’t help feeling uneasy about entrusting her beloved daughter to such a violent master.

Even now, as she sat repeating these thoughts to herself while waiting to see her beloved daughter’s face, Okiyo soon came briskly out from the

interior.

“Mother.” “Oh, come over here!”

When she tried to take her mother's hand and lead her to her room, her mother hastily refused. "No, no, it's better here — less need to stand on ceremony." "I can't stay long." "I'll speak here and take my leave." With these words, the mother studied her daughter's face. There was no particular

reason for her visit. The mother would be satisfied simply seeing her daughter's safe face once before returning home. The face reflected in the mother's eyes belonged to a beautiful woman none could call lowly — her complexion radiantly pale, eyebrows gentle, with only the slight melancholy of narrow features detracting from perfection. She had come here in her sixteenth autumn, and by this past spring had bloomed into eighteen-year-old

maidenhood. Though mother and daughter had met after New Year's formal visits and little time had passed since, each viewing revealed the girl's face growing more lovely — the mother gazed enraptured with melting eyes at this ever-brightening youth.

“You haven’t had any troubles, have you?” Okiyo asked her mother. “By good fortune, I’m in perfect health as you see.” “I’ve safely avoided this spring’s

epidemic too," her mother replied cheerfully with a laugh. "And has there been any trouble with Lord Harima?" "Lord Harima is also thriving." "Today he visited relatives of the Aoyama family and has just now returned." "I was attending to his change of garments when you arrived, which delayed my coming to meet you."

"No brawls today, I hope?" "According to Gonji, there was some sort of scuffle with the

machiyakko at Sannō-shita again today, and Lord Harima’s cloak sleeve was slightly torn.” “That’s dangerous…” The mother furrowed her brows. “And was he injured?” “Brawls are just part of the routine.” “He rarely sustains any injuries.” Gradually growing accustomed to serving in the Shirahata Group’s mansion, even the quiet girl now seemed to regard bloody brawls as no more significant than dogs fighting. That composed

demeanor became an increasing source of anxiety for her mother.

“But still… When brawls persist too long, even a lord as formidable as Lord Harima cannot always avoid injuries or mishaps in the heat of the moment. Moreover, if such matters were to reach the authorities, who knows what would become of Lord Harima’s standing?” As her mother tilted her head with an air of grave

concern, deep wrinkles forming across her forehead, Okiyo gazed at her with a faintly mocking smile. “Oh, you’re just borrowing trouble. Lord Harima is counted among the Shirahata Group’s foremost swordsmen and is also skilled in Hōzōin-ryū spearmanship — Lord Mizuno, our leader, has often praised him for this. Hoho, even if he were to face five or ten ordinary men at once, what mistake could there possibly be? When one speaks of brawls, it may

sound unsettling, but they are merely a method to hone martial skills in these peaceful times — being of a different nature than banditry or murder — so even the authorities would not find cause to make things difficult.”

Whether the family’s ways had naturally seeped into her or she was simply mimicking her master’s speech patterns, Okiyo spoke fluently without pause, trying to ease her mother’s

concerns. Contrary to what her mother had imagined, her daughter remained unexpectedly composed, leaving the older woman unable to muster a response. The mother’s primary purpose in visiting today had been to see her daughter’s face, but depending on how their conversation unfolded, she had privately wondered whether to suggest requesting leave from this disquieting mansion. Yet here was her daughter, not only

unperturbed but actively praising her brawl-prone master. This mixture of reassurance and unease kept the mother silent until Okiyo spoke again.

“I know not what the world may say of him, but Lord Harima is a man of upright heart and deep compassion — he shows care even in how he employs retainers and servants.” “Such a splendid lord cannot be found again.” “Since I wish to serve in

this mansion for many years to come, please endure being alone for now, even if it inconveniences you.”

“I’ve grown accustomed to hardship, so that doesn’t trouble me — but I worry more about your circumstances than my own.” “If it’s a mansion where brawl-loving crowds constantly come and go, who can say what kind of disturbances might arise within at any time?” “If they keep loitering about like that,

you might get caught up in the fray…”

"Hmm, I'm not like you," Okiyo laughed. "Even now, as things stand — neither you nor I are townspeople by birth. To be so timid…" Even when laughed at by her daughter, the mother didn't utter a word. This mother and daughter were not of townspeople lineage. Okiyo's father had been a ronin from the western provinces named Torigoe Nanigashi, and her

mother who accompanied him was the daughter of a samurai. Having lost her husband early, the mother had raised her daughter single-handedly through widowhood, but due to their impoverished circumstances, had eventually sent her only child into service. Yet precisely because of this lineage, both had disdained serving in townspeople households and sought positions in samurai mansions instead. That her mother would now

express anxiety about service in a warrior household struck Okiyo as somewhat inconsistent.

Of course, as a mother, she had her own valid reasons. For samurai households varied, and she reasoned that serving a master who treated brawling as his trade over time would be precarious. However, she had no desire to quarrel with her lovely daughter — even if it meant her own face reddening

in argument — so when laughed at by her daughter, she remained meekly silent.

At that moment, Osen came bringing tea. Afterwards, steward Jūdayū also emerged.

“Ah, Okiyo’s mother.” “You’ve come at last.” “Now then, serve some tea,” Jūdayū said with a beaming smile.

“In a mansion teeming with nothing but men — utter chaos.”

“The other women must be terribly busy too, but you work yourself to the bone without rest.” “Especially since our lord favors you so — with you handling all his personal affairs so dutifully, it’s been an immense relief to us.” “Lord Harima has such a violent temper, yet remains pleased with everything you do.” “Hahaha.” Okiyo’s earlobes flushed scarlet as she bowed her head. Without acknowledging this, Jūdayū

produced gold coins wrapped in white paper from his robe.

“When I informed Lord Harima of your mother’s visit, he instructed me to have her take this as a token and bestowed two gold coins.” “Accept it with gratitude.” Two gold coins — in this era, they were a considerable sum. Was it prudent to accept them so readily? As the mother hesitated to reach out, Jūdayū thrust the money pouch before her knees.

“Mark this well.” “Okiyo, observe this too, and later convey your thanks to our lord.” “We are deeply grateful.”

The mother and daughter bowed in thanks simultaneously. Hearing this, Jūdayū stood up. “Well then, take your time talking.” He casually went off to the back. Osen, tying her sash, went out to draw water from the well at the back, and the spring evening sun illuminated the long well rope as jewel-like

water spilled from the bucket.

“Oh, this water’s good…” said Okiyo’s mother, drawing near the wellside as she prepared to leave. “It’s troublesome how deep it is,” said Osen. “The depth of Yamanote wells is their renowned feature,” her mother remarked, peering into the well’s depths. “My, how deep indeed! This must make drawing water morn and eve quite trying for you.” Though she voiced complaints about the

hardship, Osen explained that when there were no official duties, the men would help draw water, so it wasn’t so terribly difficult after all. In the mansion’s garden frontage stood another well curb — shallower than this one with even clearer water — but since they couldn’t make their way to the garden front each time they needed water, she said they resigned themselves to drawing from this deeper well.

During that conversation, Okiyo appeared. She joined her mother in peering into the depths of the well, and their smiling faces rippled faintly upon the distant water’s surface.

Three

It was the morning of the second day. Okiyo had come to the kitchen as usual and was helping Osen when the retainer Gonji shrugged his shoulders

and entered from outside.

“A guest has come.” “A guest has come.”

“A guest has come…” Okiyo paused in her tidying up. “Who might it be?” “No — a right troublesome guest.” “The Master finds them troublesome too, and we’re forbidden to be seen — so lying low’s our best bet.” In the midst of this, Gonroku too came sneaking in. The person whom even those

grown men found so bothersome was easily imagined by the women as well. Osen asked with a laugh. “Is it… the Aunt from Koishikawa?”

“That’s right, that’s right. Her Ladyship the Aunt is even more terrifying than the demon aunt who came to Watanabe’s mansion to reclaim her severed arm. If we show our faces, we’ll surely be scolded. Especially today of all days — two days since then! There’s plenty of

grounds for reprimand. After all — no need to show our faces till she’s gone.” Though it was a common occurrence and nothing unusual, the sight of the men with scythe-like beards cowering before the fearsome aunt — their innocent, childlike demeanor — was unbearably amusing, so Osen let out an unrestrained laugh. However, Okiyo didn’t crack a smile. The moment she heard the name of the Aunt from Koishikawa, her pale face turned as white as

water. She pursed her lips tightly and headed toward the inner rooms.

Since serving guests was her duty, Okiyo immediately began preparing tea. When she had prepared the tea and carried it out to the drawing room, Mayumi was sitting face-to-face with her master Harima conversing amicably. Though there seemed fewer scoldings than the men had feared today — leaving Okiyo somewhat

relieved — she still harbored greater unease within herself.
“Hoho, Okiyo.” Mayumi smiled as she turned her gaze to the young maid serving them. “You remain as lovely as ever. With your master unmarried, managing women’s affairs must prove troublesome. Endure but a little longer — I ask this of you.”

“Yes,” Okiyo responded demurely, bowing with her hands placed properly. A little

more endurance — that phrase rang strangely in her ears and sent waves crashing through her young breast. “If there is need, I will call. You may withdraw,” Mayumi said quietly. Okiyo bowed politely once more and stood up. When she stood up and glanced at her master’s face, Harima was looking at the tatami mat’s pattern with a troubled expression. When faced with his formidable aunt, it was his usual habit to fall silent with a lonely expression

as though taken hostage, but today, that particularly troubled look caught Okiyo’s attention. She withdrew to the veranda once but then stealthily retraced her steps and peered through the sliding door from the neighboring drawing room one room away.

When the tea had been finished, Mayumi’s voice was heard. Though spoken softly, its dignified tone carried clearly even to Okiyo’s distant ears.

“Well now, Harima.” “I shall not nitpick over each of your recent misdeeds.” “You will surely mend your ways, will you not?” “Yes.” Harima’s reply consisted solely of that single word. “That is an unsatisfactory answer.” “Will you swear it? Or make a pledge?” Mayumi pressed further. “As peace endures in our time, even martial discipline grows lax.” “Fawning weaklings multiply among both samurai and townsfolk.” “Even I find this disgraceful.” “Yet when warriors

ape the machiyakko and rampage through every quarter of Edo, they achieve naught but needless disturbance of His Lordship’s capital.” “Should you squander lives meant to be sacrificed before His Lordship the Shogun’s banner on petty quarrels — what then?” “Surely you are not so witless as to misunderstand this reasoning.” “If samurai cannot withdraw from associations like the Shirahata Group under oath’s pretense, I shall meet Lord

Mizuno myself and ensure refusal.”

Okiyo secretly imagined that if it were Her Ladyship the Aunt, she would surely bring even Mizuno Jūrōzaemon — revered as the leader of the Shirahata Group — to heel and force her own arguments through, twisting right into wrong if need be. But if such a thing were done recklessly, the master would likely be troubled. As she strained her ears to hear how

he would respond to this, Harima indeed hurriedly cut it off. “No, there is no need for such measures.” “If Your Ladyship were to personally intervene, it would trouble Lord Mizuno and trouble me as well… I humbly request that you refrain from such measures.”

“That is not something I would prefer either,” said Mayumi. “Then will you not join their ranks? Will you now swear to behave meekly henceforth?”

“Yes.”

Just when it seemed the conversation had lapsed for a moment, the aunt’s voice was heard again. It was different from before — a voice filled with genuine warmth, gentle and tender.

“Now then, there is another matter to discuss.” “You refuse to settle in the mansion, swaggering about wherever you please.” “I suppose that

ultimately stems from our household lacking a restraining rein.” “You are already twenty-five — an age when some have become parents of two or three children — how long do you mean to remain unmarried?” “It is high time you took a proper wife and made plans to ensure prosperous descendants.” “This aunt would never suggest anything improper.” “The second daughter of Lord Ōkubo of Iidamachi — the one I mentioned briefly the other

day…”

Okiyo leaned against the sliding door as if to push it over, straining her ears so as not to miss a single word.

“Her name is Fujie.” “She is eighteen years old — her features comely, her manners excellent.” “Truly worthy of Lord Ōkubo’s upbringing, her disposition shows spiritedness.” “Were my son unmarried, I would desire to bring her into

our mansion as well, but Iori-suke is expected to become a father this autumn — there's no helping it." "To send such a girl to another household would be regrettable — by all means I wish to make her kin to us." "Now then Harima — though I may sound persistent — this aunt would never counsel anything improper." "Were you to take that girl..."

Okiyo felt her vision blurring and her ears rang fiercely. Even

to her ears, Harima’s reply came through clearly.

“I appreciate your consideration, but Lord Ōkubo of Iidamachi is of high standing — after all, to our mansion…”

“Nay, there is no need for such reserve.” “Lord Ōkubo being the sort of man he is — he would not trouble himself over matters of family standing.” “He knows you particularly well.” “Should your aunt make but a single

entreaty, he would surely consent — that I will handle.”
“What say you?”

This reply marked the critical juncture of his life. Okiyo listened without breathing, and Harima did not immediately respond. Urged by his aunt, he quietly began to speak. "I fully comprehend your words, but as this concerns my own affairs — a matter of once-in-a-lifetime gravity — " "When it comes to choosing opponents for a brawl,

I make no distinctions, but in matters of marriage proposals, even I must exercise proper judgment." "That is reasonable." "I do not expect an answer immediately." "After careful consideration, give me your answer again." "Understood?"

“Yes.”

Okiyo let out a sigh of relief and collapsed into a heap on her knees. The sliding door she had been leaning against creaked

and swayed from the movement, forcing her to crawl away stealthily before scrambling into her room — only then noticing the clammy sweat drenching her neck and armpits. Though regretting she hadn't heard the parlor conversation to its end, Harima's response had let her grasp how matters stood. The marriage proposal raised by Aunt appeared left unresolved for now. Yet Okiyo found no peace — the Aunt of Shibukawa pressing the master to wed was

no new development. She'd faintly known of last month's similar discussion now growing urgent enough for Aunt's special morning visit. Given Aunt's formidable persistence — how could Master possibly refuse outright? What if those unanswerable demands piled up twice or thrice over? At these thoughts, Okiyo's composure shattered completely.

She took out a pocket tissue and wiped the sweat from her collar.

As the sweat finally subsided, both eyelids grew moist in turn. She grew sad, as though the precarious shape of her own future had already been laid bare before her eyes. The year after Okiyo began serving at this mansion — at the end of her seventeenth spring, on a hazy moonlit night about one year prior to now — three or four friends from the Shirahata Group came visiting, and as usual, a modest drinking gathering commenced. At that

time, Mizuno Jūrōzaemon had also come. Mizuno seemed to take a great liking to Okiyo, who had served the drinks, and praised her before his master. The others also praised her in unison. Since these men prided themselves on never offering empty compliments or flattery, the fact that they all praised her in unison meant she understood their words held no sycophancy toward their master.

When the guests had left and

the parlor was tidied up, Harima requested tea from Okiyo. It was already past 10pm, and the cherry blossoms halfway in bloom under the hazy moon cast pale shadows along the eaves. The lukewarm night wind that gently stirred the shadows flowed past, scattering white petals like moonlit dewdrops onto the sleeves of Harima, whose face — still flushed from sobering up — was brushed by the breeze at the edge of the veranda.

Okiyo now recalled, as though it were happening anew, the dream from that night carved into her heart's depths. The love between young master and maid had gradually deepened from then onward, until Harima swore to Okiyo that he would make her his lawful wife. Never had Okiyo forgotten that vow. To her mother's anxious eyes, this mansion of quarrel-seeking Shirahata warriors seemed perilous — yet to the daughter,

it remained paradise. But since marriage talks had begun for her master days earlier, the young maid's heart found no respite. Now today came this knee-to-knee confrontation with Aunt. Though matters might settle temporarily now, dread of what must follow left her weeping in utter despair.

As the voices of Osen and the men could still be heard in the kitchen, Okiyo suddenly stood up and took out her hand

mirror. After fixing her tear-streaked face reflected in the mirror, she too headed to the kitchen, where Gonji and Gonroku sat side by side on the raised threshold, their large frames lined up as they leisurely groomed their sickle-shaped beards with silver tweezers glinting in the spring sunlight. When they saw Okiyo’s face, they asked. “Has Aunt not returned yet?” “It does not appear their discussion will conclude anytime soon,” Okiyo

said. “However, it does not appear to be her usual reprimand.”

“Well, that’s a first,” Gonji laughed. “This year’s rainy season might come a month early. But I wonder if Her Ladyship has any business beyond scoldings.”

“Could it perhaps be regarding the marriage proposal?” ventured Osen.

“Hmm, I’ve heard such rumors,” said Gonroku disinterestedly. “That Her Ladyship sure is a meddler — making such a fuss over every little thing. His Lordship, who hates face powder, would rarely take on such a troublesome wife — would he?” “Wahahaha!” “Could it be that the master is taking a wife?” Okiyo probed. “That’s obviously going to be refused,” Gonji declared. “Are you acquainted with the daughter of Lord Ōkubo of Iidamachi?”

Okiyo pressed again.

The men, who held no regard for half-hearted women, claimed to know nothing of daughters from other mansions. However, as the Ōkubo family had no sons, the one to be sent as a bride would likely be the second daughter. The younger sister was reputed to surpass her elder sister in both beauty and charm, but they said they had never once laid eyes on her.

“Is she truly that beautiful…?” pressed Okiyo in a trembling voice. “’Tis nothing but a rumor.” The men didn’t even deign to engage.

IV

After seeing Aunt off, Harima too immediately went out somewhere. Gonji and Gonroku also accompanied him as attendants and left.

The long days of late were

reluctant to fade. Though she knew it was his usual habit that once gone, there was no telling when he might return, today alone Okiyo found herself waiting restlessly for her master's return. She wanted to know her master's true intentions regarding this marriage proposal.

From society’s perspective, Master Harima might be considered an uncontrollable troublemaker. From Aunt’s

perspective, he might be a quarrelsome nuisance. Yet through Okiyo’s eyes, he seemed beautifully noble — straight as split bamboo, without a trace of deceit or pretense, so much that one might call him a samurai among samurai. Whether the man was a seven hundred koku lord or not mattered little — she had never once considered erasing this love now etched into her soul. She had trusted utterly in her master’s unfeigned promise.

She clung fiercely to her belief that her lord would never deceive her.

Okiyo still believed this. And what cast this dark shadow over the depths of her heart was the cruel, sorrowful law of human society — each person’s immutable station. In every era, this law had manifested in various forms, but it was particularly severe during the Edo period in which she was born. A master could torment

and kill retainers without consequence. For retainers, not only killing their master but even inflicting a single scratch would result in capital punishment; depending on the circumstances, they could face public display of the head or crucifixion. Born into an era of such stringent class hierarchy, a retainer falls in love with their master. Whether that love would be fulfilled depended entirely on the master’s discretion, and from the retainer themselves,

not a word of resentment could be voiced. Even if one swore by the mountains, swore by the sea, swore by all the gods and buddhas, it was no different from the empty vows of courtesans — for the master to cast them aside meant nothing. Of course, even between those of equal social standing, once a man’s heart changed, any promise being cast aside followed nature’s course — but in love across differing stations, no matter how cruelly and

pitifully one was rejected, the abandoned party received little sympathy, and the one who abandoned them faced no reproach. In love too there existed a hierarchy — Okiyo had long known of unfortunate women who, though heavy with their masters' children, were cast out from mansions.

This cruel edict was not limited to the relationship between masters and retainers. Among relatives too, this law lay like an

immovable stone. When one lacks a father, regard one’s uncle as father — so it was decreed. When one lacks a mother, regard one’s aunt as mother — so it was decreed. Therefore, for a self-reliant man like Aoyama Harima — who had no father, no uncle, no mother — the aunt stood as the most formidable figure. When she pressed down with parental authority head-on, repelling it required extraordinary resolve. Bound by the Shirahata Group’s

code that prioritized duty above all, Aoyama Harima — their sworn member — found himself constrained to honor his aunt’s rights completely. Now this aunt demanded he wed the daughter of Ōkubo so-and-so. Given his strong-willed nature yet equally unyielding adherence to obligation, whether he could muster the courage to defy his aunt until the end seemed precarious to Okiyo.

If this were taken to its logical

conclusion, the aunt would force her nephew into an unwanted marriage. The master would force his retainers to abandon their love against their will. One could not accept that a day when such a tragic fate loomed would never come. Okiyo’s premature anxieties took strong root from one worry to the next.

“His Lordship is not such a liar.” She reconsidered once more, mocking her own narrow-

mindedness. Human edicts and worldly obligations — in the end, they all hinged on a man’s heart alone. If only the resolve of the man she relied upon remained steadfast, there would be no need to fear any storm. With how a man handled the rudder, no matter what tempests he battled, he could surely drift to the opposite shore. The master and retainers needed not reconsider now. Aoyama Harima was a man without deceit. She need only

cling in her heart to that man’s hand. She would think of nothing anymore. To fret and waver like this was her own shallow-mindedness — Okiyo strove to drive these doubts from her mind.

Osen had been working on altering her summer kimono, but the long daylight hours of needlework seemed to have wearied her; with eyes so heavy she could barely see the needle's tip, she dazedly let her

hands rest. The four o'clock bell of Ichigaya tolled drowsily, its sound sinking heavily. Okiyo soon left Osen's side and quietly rose.

Though knowing her master was away, she found herself drawn toward his quarters. Peering into the stewards’ duty room, she saw Shibata Jūdayū leaning against a small desk, his white-haired head tilted as if half-asleep. Okiyo stole past on tiptoe, and when she reached

the veranda edge of her master’s quarters, even the broad-eaved cherry tree’s pale silhouette seemed abruptly gaunt compared to yesterday. As she gazed up mournfully, the sunlight — already wheeling westward — faded gradually, while petals quivering in dusk-summoning chill fell soundlessly. When the cold floral scent pierced Okiyo’s flesh, tears rose unbidden once more.

While gently wiping her eyes, she intently watched the fluttering petals' path — a small flurry of them wavered lightly and was blown onto the garden well curb. Beside the well curb stood a single slender willow, as if peering into the water. Okiyo slipped into her garden clogs and approached the well curb. While brushing away willow threads that teased her disheveled Shimada-style sidelocks with her long-sleeved kimono sleeve, she peered into

the well's depths — yet in the water's reflection lay only her shadowed face, her mother's beloved visage nowhere to be seen. She remembered what had happened the day before yesterday.

His Lordship had bestowed two koban upon her mother. Mother had been surprised, but she herself had been startled as well. When she accompanied Mother to the gate upon her departure, Mother seemed to

harbor unease about the unexpected gift and repeatedly asked her as if to confirm whether it was truly acceptable to receive it. Of course, for the parent of an ordinary servant, this was an extraordinary bestowed gift. It was only natural for Mother to be suspicious. She considered whispering the explanation that was no mystery at all to reassure Mother, but lacking the courage to reveal the secret between her master and herself,

she made some hasty excuse and parted ways. She was glad she hadn’t told Mother about it. She thought that if she were to carelessly reveal it, there might come a time when even Mother would be plunged into the abyss of disappointment. Thinking of this, she was overcome by an inescapable sadness. However, on the other hand, the fact that he had bestowed two koban upon her mother could also be seen as evidence that His Lordship loved her. There’s no

way His Lordship, being who he was, would cruelly cast her aside. She gazed at her tear-dried smile reflected in the distant water mirror.

Whether she should weep or laugh — Okiyo could no longer tell. Even so, teardrops flowed from her eyes for no reason. While clinging to the willow's green branch, she wanted to weep to her heart's content at the well curb.

“Okiyo. What are you doing? Did you drop something from your head?” When suddenly called out to, she turned to find her master Harima standing firmly on the veranda, laughing.
“You’ve returned, my lord? I hadn’t realized…” Okiyo hastily bowed, wiping her eyes with her sleeve.

Harima silently beckoned. Summoned, Okiyo returned to the veranda, but as if fearing her tear-streaked face would be

noticed, she revealed her white collar and gazed down at the scattered flowers beneath her feet.

“Okiyo. “You were crying.” “Why are you crying?” “Did you quarrel with your peers?” “Did Jūdayū rebuke you?” Okiyo remained silent as if abashed. “Don’t conceal it. “Give your account.” “Or do you mean to cast yourself into the well curb?” Harima laughed again.

Where had he been drinking? The young samurai’s lustrous white cheeks were faintly flushed.

“I am not crying,” Okiyo answered softly. “Then show me your face. “Ha ha, you won’t show me,” Harima taunted again. “If you don’t speak honestly, I’ll dismiss you.” Startled, Okiyo raised her face. Dismissal — she could no longer brush that off as a joke. Uncontrollable grudge and

jealousy swirled like a whirlwind in her chest and arose. Harima gazed suspiciously at that extraordinary look in her eyes but soon burst into uncontrollable laughter.

“Ha ha… Dismissing you — that was just a jest.” “Don’t be angry.” “Or is there another reason?” “If you won’t explain yourself, it’s only natural I end up teasing you.” “If you’re so angry, then explain yourself

properly.” When Okiyo thought of what unsightly appearance she had shown the man, her shame gave way to sudden sorrow. She buried her face in her long-sleeved kimono and prostrated herself in tears on the veranda edge.

“Hmm, you sniveling wretch. How could such a weakling ever become the wife of a Shirahata Group samurai?” Seizing the moment, Okiyo asked back through her tears. “A samurai’s

wife… Could this Kiku ever become a samurai’s wife?”

“Of course.” “Aoyama Harima is a samurai of some standing.” “If you were that wife…” “But Lady Shibukawa…” “Oh. You knew about that?” Harima remarked casually. “Even my formidable aunt cannot force this matter through sheer will alone.” “So that’s why you were crying?” “Ha ha, you fool!” Harima laughed loudly with an unclouded voice. Having been

dismissed too lightly, Okiyo — as if losing her momentum — blinked her tear-swollen eyes and glanced up at him. The face of the man gradually sobering from his drunkenness appeared to glow brilliantly.

“Do not doubt Harima.”

The master took the maid’s hand.

Five

About ten more days passed, and Harima was summoned to Shibukawa’s mansion. Okiyo thought it must surely be a demand for his response to the marriage proposal. She grew impatient to discern the situation from her master’s complexion after his return from Koishikawa, but with her young, love-clouded eyes — shadowed as they were — she could not discern any secret from her man’s face. Yet, the thought of being perceived as a jealous,

vulgar woman was also sorrowful, so she could not bring herself to persistently interrogate her master either.

"Do not doubt Harima" — clinging to these words as her staff, Okiyo spent her days in torment until the cherry blossoms in the garden became battered by storms, and departing spring vanished behind new foliage.

The Fourth Month arrived with

cuckoos singing, and the change to summer robes lightened one’s skin, but Okiyo’s heart did not lighten at all. With the changing of the month, Harima was once again summoned to Shibukawa’s mansion.

“What could be the honorable purpose behind these frequent invitations to the Shibukawa mansion?” When Okiyo casually inquired with Jūdayū, even the indifferent steward tilted his head.

“I don’t know. “Is it the usual reprimand, or perhaps an honorable consultation about bringing in a wife?” “Most likely, it must be something like that.” “Shall I summon the lady?” “The master is already twenty-five — one cannot say such a thing is out of the question.”

“Did the master himself say that directly?” “No — I haven’t heard anything.”

Whether stewards, young retainers, or servants — none in this mansion had ever treated matters concerning women as worthy of consideration from the very beginning. Since they maintained an air of indifference toward whether a mistress came or not, Okiyo found herself unable to discern how this affair might develop no matter whom she approached. She remained alone and grew increasingly agitated. That such unconcerned individuals were

assembled regarding matters of romance had proven advantageous for shrouding the secret between master and maid — yet precisely because they had succeeded in preserving that secrecy until now, Okiyo discovered she could find no allies in this predicament. Even Osen, being another woman, failed to become someone she might consult.

On the night of the seventh day

— said to commemorate Buddha’s birth — eight or nine leading members of the Shirahata Group were to assemble at the Aoyama mansion. There was no particular occasion. Just as in years past, members of their faction would gather to host a private drinking banquet. Mizuno Jūrōzaemon, their leader, had naturally declared his attendance. “The gathering begins at the sixth hour of dusk.” “Do not slacken in your

preparations.” “And have those Korean plates brought out.”

Having given instructions to his retainers, Harima went out somewhere around noon.

Today was a busy day for the women. Jūdayū and the young retainers pitched in as well, and the men tucked up their hakama hems to begin preparing the sake and dishes.

“First, this should settle the

essentials,” said Shibata Jūdayū, wiping sweat from his balding forehead while speaking.

“It’s still early yet — shall we retrieve that important item now?” “Okiyo and Osen, come along as well.”

The two women followed the steward and went to the inner storehouse. The old storehouse was like a storage shed and held almost nothing of value, but for the Aoyama family, it contained

the one truly important item they possessed. It was a rare set of Goryeo ware plates, ten in total. No one fully understood why a samurai family treasured such vessels, but as their significance as rarities in the world gradually intensified, a terrifying legend emerged in some generation: should all these plates ever be shattered, the house would perish. Thus, in the Aoyama household, these plates were regarded as treasures. Servants were sternly

informed that should they accidentally shatter even a single one, they must consider their lives forfeit — a stricture that had become the family's ancestral edict.

Since carelessly retrieving such a troublesome treasure was dangerous, it had rarely been used since Harima's time, but Mizuno — having somehow learned of it — spoke to his lord Harima about tonight's gathering. "I hear your

household possesses a rare set of Goryeo plates.” “I would very much like to see them tomorrow night.”

“Understood.” Harima readily agreed and instructed Jūdayū to add his ten Goryeo plates to the vessels that would hold tonight’s dishes. Both Okiyo and Osen had handled those plates when they were boxed during seasonal airing, but tonight marked the first time they were to be placed on serving trays for

a meal. They had long been aware of the terrifying legends surrounding those plates and the strict edicts associated with them. “It goes without saying, but these are precious items.” “Be absolutely sure not to let your guard down.”

Even now, having been sternly reminded by Jūdayū, the two women were terrified afresh. With layer upon layer of caution, they reverently carried out the boxed plates from the

depths of the storehouse, whereupon Jūdayū opened the lid and meticulously inspected the ten white plates. “Good, good. “I may sound repetitive, but handle them with utmost care. “Not only breaking even a single one — even chipping them will bring calamity.” This was truly a grave matter. It was a matter of life and death. At this thought, both Okiyo and Osen were horrified to the point their hair stood on end. The two women received the plates in

their trembling fingers and resolved to carefully return them to their original box until the moment came to finally carry them out to the drawing room.

“It’s already past seven.” “The master will soon return.” “The eager guests may start arriving at any moment.” “Okiyo, go to the back and make sure the drawing rooms are properly prepared — check every corner as a precaution.” Instructed by

Shibata Jūdayū, Okiyo promptly headed to the inner drawing rooms. Under a pale overcast sky, the young leaves in the poorly maintained garden had gradually thickened into green shadows, darkening the veranda of the study hall — its two ten-mat rooms left wide open. In the dimly lit alcove of that drawing room hung the kerria that Okiyo had arranged that morning, its branches laden with yellow blossoms. She adjusted the branch arrangement ever so

slightly and gazed at the Three Shrines’ Oracles hanging scroll before her as if seeing it anew. After confirming there was no visible dust in every corner of the drawing room, she stepped out onto the veranda and neatly arranged three pairs of garden geta on the stepping stones.

There was nothing amiss now, she reassured herself. The standing lanterns would be lit after dusk.

While muttering to herself, she stood entranced on the veranda. The deep, resonant tones of a koto from the neighboring mansion filtered through the young leaves and drifted softly toward her. She listened half-consciously, her ear drawn to the sound. Okiyo knew the owner of the koto. She was the eldest daughter of the neighboring mansion, taken as a bride four or five years prior to a high-ranking family of vastly mismatched status due to her

beauty. At first, their marital harmony was so enviably close that it drew admiration, but as time passed, the husband’s affection gradually cooled, and true to the proverb “disparity breeds estrangement,” the bride was sent back to her parents’ home. And so, she consoled the wretched sorrow of her returned existence with the strains of the koto. Whether real or imagined, those plucking sounds trembled piteously, as if to flick away people’s tears.

Whenever Okiyo heard those deep, somber tones, she would be moved to tears by the sorrow of a woman cruelly cast aside by a man — and now those tears welled up once more. This must be what they mean by having one’s heartstrings plucked. To Okiyo now, especially, the koto player’s plight seemed painfully vivid. The melancholy koto song sang of the player’s sorrow, and she began to suspect it might also make the listener aware of their own grief.

Okiyo leaned against the veranda pillar, listening entranced to the song and melody as if being drawn in, while the overcast early summer sky gradually dimmed and the shadow of the willow by the well grew dark. She suddenly recalled something. Though she thought it unthinkable, it now seemed the perfect opportunity to ascertain the true nature of the man who must not be doubted.

That referred to those Korean porcelain plates. They were the ten plates said to be treasures of the Aoyama household. Okiyo conceived the idea to shatter one of those plates to measure the depth of Harima’s affection. When she prostrated herself before her master with claims of having carelessly damaged the precious plate during a moment’s distraction — what would Harima say? What would he do? If he truly loved her, then

even if she damaged his family’s treasure, he ought not punish her harshly. “I should feign carelessness — break one of those plates — and test whether Master’s true heart values Okiyo or his treasure.”

While conceiving this plan, she nevertheless hesitated once more. She feared the ominous legend that when all those plates were shattered, the House of Aoyama would perish. However, if only a single plate

were damaged, surely no calamity or curse would befall the house. If the person who damaged it received the master's punishment, that would settle the matter. In this situation, I naturally could not afford to fear death. If he were a master who would mercilessly punish me for damaging a single plate, then it was clear he held no deep affection for me. If my master's heart were truly so cold, this marriage proposal would indeed materialize as

reality, and I would ultimately be cast aside without question. Could I go on living if Harima were to discard me? Okiyo turned her gaze to the well curb where dark willows swayed.

Since there was no love from the man, I could not go on living no matter what. If he truly loved me, then even if I damaged the treasure, I could certainly go on living. Okiyo resolved to stake her life to lay bare the man’s soul. Though she thought it

wasteful to destroy even a single precious plate so needlessly, she could no longer afford to fear such consequences.

The sound of the koto from next door still continued. When Okiyo returned to the kitchen — suddenly emboldened as if demon-possessed — neither Jūdayū nor the young retainers were anywhere to be seen. Osen was drawing water from the back well.

Six “Ah!”

By the time Jūdayū rushed into the kitchen upon hearing Okiyo’s frantic scream, one of the Korean plates lay shattered. Even Jūdayū — ordinarily indifferent to material concerns — widened his eyes in panic. Okiyo claimed she had dropped the precious plate through carelessness.

“Even after I gave you such

explicit warnings earlier, this careless blunder endangers not just yourself — I myself, Jūdayū, cannot begin to imagine what retribution we may incur.”
“Withdraw to your chambers at once and keep yourself there in meek silence.”

Okiyo was confined to her own room. She, who had resolved herself from the start, waited without the slightest hint of unease — and before the evening bell marking the sixth

hour could sound, Harima returned.

“My lord, an unthinkable incident has occurred.”

When Jūdayū saw his master’s face, he immediately appealed.

“An unthinkable incident…”
“Jūdayū,” Harima laughed, “this ill becomes you. What could possibly warrant such panic?”
“My lord — truly, I cannot remain calm.” “One of the

precious plates has been damaged.” Harima’s countenance hardened. “What… A precious plate damaged…?” “The maid Okiyo, through her blunder, has shattered it cleanly in two.” “Summon Okiyo.” Summoned, Okiyo went to the inner quarters. She carried the broken plate wrapped in a silk cloth. Her face, illuminated by the lanterns the young retainers had brought out, was deathly pale. Harima asked quietly.

“Kiku.” “The Korean plate — it was you who broke it, was it not?”

Okiyo calmly stated that it was undoubtedly her own carelessness. She declared that having damaged the family treasure through her grave incompetence, she would harbor no resentment regardless of what punishment she received. "First and foremost, you demonstrate proper resolve," Harima nodded. "For the House

of Aoyama, this is indeed an ancestral treasure of great import, but being mere carelessness, I cannot bring myself to censure you severely." "Take utmost care henceforth." Needless to say, she would have to exercise caution from then on. The reprimand for damaging the precious heirloom ended with only this. Okiyo's taut composure slackened all at once, and she collapsed onto the veranda with hands braced. As even Jūdayū stood dumbstruck

by his master's excessive leniency, Harima spoke quietly again.

“This evening’s guests number seven besides Lord Mizuno as the guest of honor, and including the host, that makes exactly nine. Even if one plate is missing, it won’t pose a problem.” “Regardless of the esteemed guests’ circumstances, for Okiyo’s transgression in breaking one of the ten precious utensils that

were finally gathered in full, I too humbly offer my apologies,” Jūdayū said, pressing his forehead to the edge of the tatami mat. Harima’s countenance gradually softened. He stared intently at the undulations of Okiyo’s black hair in the shadow of the lantern light — Okiyo, who remained prostrated on the veranda, trembling faintly — then turned back to Jūdayū with a faint smile.

“No, no — set your mind at ease. Even if they’re called ancestral heirlooms, they’re different from weapons or horse gear — in the end, they’re just plates and bowls. I don’t consider them particularly valuable. But if those old-fashioned relatives hear of this, it’ll be troublesome. Ensure that publicly, it still appears all ten remain intact. Understood?”
“Your repeated gracious consideration is most humbling. I shall attend to every detail.

Kiku, offer your thanks once more.”

Okiyo silently bowed her head. Her chest felt so tight she could no longer speak. Tears of gratitude streamed down without stopping. Rather than pride in her scheme’s success, she felt overwhelmed by the man’s genuine devotion. The sin of having dared test such a noble heart now filled her with terrifying emptiness. “The guests will arrive shortly.

Jūdayū, prepare to receive them at the entrance,” Harima instructed, dismissing the steward. Only the shattered plate and the girl who broke it remained.

"What a terrible blunder I’ve committed. I have no excuse to offer," Okiyo spoke for the first time. The low, trembling quality of her voice Harima interpreted solely as regret over her carelessness, so he comforted her compassionately. “Enough

of your long-winded apologies.” “One apology suffices.” “To speak truthfully, it is our house’s law that any retainer who accidentally shatters a family heirloom spanning generations faces execution by sword — but do you think I would have you executed?” “Dispose of the shattered plate in the well’s depths where none may see it.”

“Yes.” Wiping her welling tears once more, Okiyo took the chipped plate and descended

into the garden. Her long sleeves swayed the willow branches as one of the family treasures was sunk to the water’s depths.

“To tell the truth, when I encountered Lord Mizuno earlier, he inquired whether my maid Kiku was still performing her duties without mishap.” “Was that indeed so?” “Lord Mizuno holds an uncommon partiality toward you.” “Attend to your service with care again

tonight,” Harima said with a cheerful smile.

Seeing the man’s cheerful face — beautiful as ever and free of shadows — Okiyo felt a happiness so profound it verged on sorrow. Even if it had been mere carelessness — for herself, who had damaged the family treasure — he had not uttered a single harsh rebuke but instead offered gentle words. Understanding the man’s heart all too completely, Okiyo felt it

verged on sacrilege. Her own sin of having shattered the precious treasure through groundless doubts grew ever more regrettable. Relief and regret entwined as one as she gently wiped her eyes again.

Along the veranda came the sound of hurried footsteps, and Jūdayū reappeared there. That was not news of guests arriving. He glared and pleaded once more to his master.

“My lord.” “Okiyo is an utterly insolent wretch.”

The secret was instantly exposed. Okiyo’s damaging of the plate was no accident. She had struck it against the kitchen pillar and deliberately shattered it. This was because Osen, the maid, had indeed witnessed this from a distance near the well. "If it were mere carelessness, there would be nothing to be done," he said, "but deliberately shattering a precious heirloom

is utterly beyond pardon — even should my lord grant forgiveness, I cannot consent." "That Okiyo must be interrogated without fail," Jūdayū declared vehemently, his voice sharpening.

Harima was unexpectedly surprised. Unable to believe that anyone in this mansion — not just Okiyo — could commit such violence, he questioned Okiyo just to be certain while doubting his own ears.

“Well, Kiku? Jūdayū makes such claims, but surely that cannot be the case. Explain yourself clearly.”

To deceive the man further was something Okiyo could not endure. The witness was merely Osen alone. Even if she were to make any accusation, as long as we persistently maintained it was mere carelessness, it would ultimately amount to nothing more than a water dispute.

Moreover, since the Master was on our side, it stood to reason that if I persisted in my stubbornness, I would surely prevail. Moreover, she lacked the courage to repeat that deception. While fully recognizing the man’s sincere devotion, she thought repaying it with deceit would be too grave a sin. She honestly confessed.

“In truth, just as the Lord Steward said, it was due to my

own misunderstanding that I deliberately shattered the plate.” Harima was shocked as though forced to grasp a red-hot branding iron. That someone who would intentionally damage his ancestral treasure — such an ill-intentioned person — could be nesting within his own mansion was something he had never even dreamed of, yet this had now been discovered in his very midst. Rather than growing angry, he was simply astonished and suspicious. “Yet I can’t

believe Kiku has gone mad either.” There had to be some reason behind this. “I will personally conduct the interrogation. You are dismissed for now.”

Jūdayū was once again dismissed. The shattered plate had already sunk to the bottom of the well. This time, it was a confrontation between the woman who had broken the plate and her master. Nevertheless, Harima

conducted the interrogation gently. “Now, Kiku.” “Under what reasoning did you deliberately shatter the precious plate?” “By house code, breaking that plate warrants execution by sword.” “Knowing that full well, there must be a reason you deliberately shattered it with your own hands.” “Out with it!” “What more could I possibly hide?” “It was from my baseless suspicions that…”

“Suspicion… What suspicion?” “I doubted Master’s heart…” Okiyo began to speak but then trembled violently, as if only now realizing the gravity of her words. Harima stared fixedly as he listened. “As I mentioned before, through the esteemed matchmaker arranged by your honorable aunt in Koishikawa, a lady from the Ōkubo residence in Iidamachi is likely to enter your household as your bride.” “Day and night, that alone stuck in my chest…” “In my

presumptuousness, I sought to test Master’s heart…”

“Hmm. “So you thought this Harima viewed you as nothing but a fleeting flower? “Did you take this heart for one that would never forsake you? “To ascertain that true heart, you deliberately shattered the family’s treasure — to see whether I valued the heirloom or you more dearly — and sought to confirm the nature of this Harima’s resolve? “Kiku, is

this truly the case?” “Yes.”

“Is that truly the case?” Harima pressed for confirmation.

“Yes.” Before her second reply could finish, Okiyo was already pinned down on the wooden veranda, Harima’s hand gripping her collar hair tightly.

“You wretch! To go to such lengths to test my heart — this is beyond hateful!” The man’s soul seemed seared and

ravaged by fury — his voice and body trembling as he hurled abuse. Aoyama Harima, hatamoto of the realm, had sworn in his heart that in matters of love there would be no divide between lord and retainer — that even mingling with you, a mere maid, the only flower he saw blooming across all Japan was the solitary chrysanthemum of his household. I am a Mikawa samurai of unyielding loyalty. Once resolved single-mindedly,

he had never once set foot in Yoshiwara even through dealings with the Shirahata Group. I’ve never taken up women’s cups even at tanzen bathhouses. Do you think maintaining such unyielding duty could be achieved through lies and deceit? Even when laid bare for all to see — what deficiency made you doubt this Harima? — he roared with near madness and, using all his strength, dragged the frail woman about and tormented

her mercilessly. The woman’s white cheek was pressed against the wooden floorboards.

Tonight, as there were to be guests, Okiyo had put on a new ceremonial kimono. It was a long-sleeved kimono emblazoned with chrysanthemum flowers — her namesake — dyed large in white and yellow against a pale violet ground, but its sleeves and cuffs were crushed under the man’s

violent grip, the beautiful blossoms trampled into ruin as he mauled the fabric. The body of the woman wearing it was likewise crushed into ruin, and her freshly styled Shimada updo came completely undone from the roots. Under labored breath, she apologized to the man through her tears.

“The suspicion has already been cleared.” “Please forgive me.” Even though the woman’s suspicions had been cleared,

the man’s resentment remained unresolved. No matter what the aunt from Koishikawa might say, how could he have interpreted that oath sworn so vehemently — to never take another wife? “What lack made you test this Harima? What evidence made you doubt this Harima?” he reproached the woman while tears of frustration gushed forth. No matter how he considered it, he was vexed. His unclouded heart had been doubted by the woman — the

thought of it made him writhe with vexation.

Okiyo also apologized while choking on tears. She had always known that Master’s heart was unclouded. Even knowing this, that she had doubted him out of the shallow-heartedness of a woman was a grave error. "Please forgive me," she pleaded with the man in a voice choked as if coughing up blood.

Even then, Harima could not bring himself to forgive. To have been doubted by the woman, to have been tested even through the shattering of the ancestral treasure — to uphold his manly honor, he could not bear it unless he killed her. With eyes filled with tears glaring, he delivered his final verdict to the woman.

“No matter how much you apologize now, the sin of having once doubted an innocent

person will never vanish in your lifetime.” “Now, prepare yourself and face it directly.”

Pushing Okiyo away there, Harima went to take the sword from the sword rack. The sound of the koto next door was no longer heard.

Seven

It was true that Okiyo had intentionally broken the plate. Osen had not lied at all. The

woman had carelessly let it slip to Jūdayū in a moment of loose lips, but later came to regret it. If something like Okiyo facing execution were to happen because she had blurted out something careless, it would be disastrous. Okiyo’s grudge was terrifying. She could no longer remain calm, and when she stealthily crept to investigate the inner chambers — finding Okiyo being brutally punished by her master and weeping in a pitiful state — Osen became

utterly unable to endure it.

She went to Jūdayū and pleaded for Okiyo’s intercession, but as Jūdayū seemed to hold little sympathy for Okiyo regarding the matter, Osen grew increasingly frantic and turned next to the retainers Gonji and Gonroku.

Okiyo’s crime was grave. No matter what punishment she faced, it couldn't be helped. However, from the retainers’

perspective, she was merely a woman. Handling boneless jellyfish or tofu wouldn’t require any effort to manage. If by any chance it came to execution, we would somehow offer apologies — so having agreed, the two retainers circled around to the garden entrance and were quietly peering in when indeed the master came out carrying his sword. Seeing that there was no more time to delay, the two men rushed out and prostrated themselves before

the stepping stones. They pleaded in unison for Okiyo’s life, but Harima paid no heed.

In the course of their pleas, Gonji let slip words to the effect that attempting to trade a single human life for one plate — no matter how precious a treasure it might be — constituted too cruel an act.

“The resentment Harima feels today is beyond your understanding.” “No matter

how precious a treasure it may be, I would never think to exchange a single human life for one plate.” “If you think I’m punishing Okiyo out of regret for the plate — that’s a grave misunderstanding.” “Call Jūdayū.” Harima summoned Jūdayū and had him bring four or five more plates. Then, striking those plates against his sword guard, he smashed them all into tiny fragments. The master explained to his retainers, who were watching in

astonishment.

“That Harima doesn’t value the plates — this should’ve made even you lot understand.”
“There are other reasons for executing Kiku — things you lot know nothing about.” “But Kiku must have been prepared.”
“Step out to the garden without hesitation.” “Yes.”

Okiyo stepped down into the garden without hesitation. She was fully aware of her great

crime — having doubted the sincerity of an innocent man. She thought it was only natural that the man would show no mercy. At the same time, having fallen in love once in her life and having clearly discerned that there had been no deceit in that man, she thought she could die satisfied. She tidied her disheveled appearance and knelt quietly on the ground. A cold wind passing through the young leaves rustled her disheveled hair and made the

lamplight in the room flicker. Okiyo exposed her white nape in the lamplight, bowed her head, and pressed her hands together.

Harima took his sword and descended into the dim garden. Jūdayū and the retainers could only watch in silence. Even they, though accustomed to bloodshed, could not bear to witness the young woman’s mournful death and had slightly averted their eyes — when

suddenly a sword’s strike rang out. Then came their master’s voice. “Dispose of the woman’s corpse.” When the three raised their eyes, Okiyo lay on the cold earth, cut diagonally from her right shoulder down her back. Harima ordered them to sink her body to the bottom of the well curb.

Gonji and Gonroku lifted Okiyo’s corpse and quietly sank it into the well, and the sound of water swallowing the woman echoed

as if trapped in the dark depths. Harima ordered them to light that standing lantern. Before long, the lantern grew bright, casting a pale light over the willow-shaded edge of the well, and Harima quietly approached to peer into the depths of the well curb. He gave orders to Jūdayū and had all of his own shattered plates thrown into the well. The Aoyama family’s ancestral treasures and Harima’s lifelong love — all were buried in the deep depths

of this well.

The dusk sixth-hour bell resounded.

“Why are the guests so late?” Harima returned to the reception room and furrowed his brows. Jūdayū, also feeling uneasy, went out to the gate to check, where the gatekeeper Yojibē whispered to him. Though he hadn’t seen it himself, there was a rumor going around that the Shirahata

Group and the machiyakko were brawling somewhere nearby. The speculation was that this might indeed be Lord Mizuno’s group. Deeming this impossible to ignore, Jūdayū immediately turned back to the inner chambers to report to his master, whereupon Harima stood up halfway through listening.

“Good.” “Harima will rush there at once and chase off those hateful wretches, I tell you.” He

hitched his hakama high at the hips. When he removed the spear hanging from the rack, the black scabbard was instantly flung away, and the ice-like long blade glinted coldly in the lamplight. Tucking it in, Harima rushed out through the front entrance in long strides, and the two retainers rolled up their sleeves and followed after their master. Harima, who had been resolved to rampage freely and would not be satisfied until he had run three or five men

through with his spear, was suddenly disappointed. He exited the mansion gate and, before he had run even one chō, encountered Mizuno’s group coming from ahead.

“The brawl…?” Harima asked hurriedly. “Nah, nothing’s happened,” answered Mizuno at the front with a laugh. “There hasn’t been a single brawl today. Even the hungry ghosts of hell can’t get their fill when it’s not their hour. Ha ha ha ha!”

As he inquired further, it became clear this didn’t involve their group — rather, some samurai had detained a townsman over minor disrespect, the rumor having grown beyond reality — and Harima’s disappointment deepened. Now making his retainer carry the cumbersome long spear while escorting Mizuno back to the mansion, an indescribable loneliness came pressing thickly against his chest.

In addition to Mizuno, seven guests were shown to the reception room. A lively banquet was held. Noticing Kiku’s absence from the gathering, Mizuno asked the master. “I don’t see my favored maid here.” “The maid… that maid called Kiku has just been executed by sword,” Harima said in a slightly subdued voice.

“Execution by sword…” “That’s a cruel punishment,” Mizuno

remarked, his straight eyebrows furrowing slightly. “What transgression did she commit?” When told the details of how the Korean plate had been shattered, Mizuno’s expression grew even darker.

“Because I said I wanted to see that plate, you killed a woman?” “Killing her is no great matter.” “It is human law that those who bear guilt must be slain.”

Harima suddenly let out a loud

laugh. He had someone bring out the three or four remaining plates he had shattered and showed them to Mizuno.

Mizuno also praised them. The others also praised them. No matter how much he was praised, Harima felt nothing. He simply drank sake recklessly and occasionally let out a loud laugh.

“The other day, I met your aunt at a certain place,” said Mizuno.

“Your aunt seems sorely troubled by your brawling habits and pointedly asked me to admonish you.” “Ha ha ha ha.” “That aunt of yours is quite a crafty one.” “Seeing I couldn’t prevail in a war of words, I quietly retreated from the verbal confrontation.”

“Ha ha, what’s this about your aunt…” Harima sneered with an eerie grin. “Even if she threatens disownment with her next breath, that trick won’t

work on me now. What’s a lone man like me to do but live like this? Roam all eight hundred neighborhoods of Edo — brawling day and night… That’s Harima’s only trade now.”
“Stubborn to the core,” Mizuno laughed.

Eight After the guests had left, Harima smashed all the remaining Korean plates and threw them into the bottom of the same well. When all these plates were shattered, the

household would perish — he had never given such a notion any thought.

From then on, his temperament grew increasingly violent. Having lost both love and treasure at once, he had no path left but to make brawling his trade. Already prone to quarrels, he became like a tiger that had tasted blood and rampaged throughout Edo. Even among the Shirahata Group, which gathered ruffians, his

actions stood out particularly. At times, he left even Mizuno, their leader, astonished. He had of course brushed aside the marriage proposal from Iidamachi. He had of course been disowned by his aunt Shibukawa as well. He went around picking fights everywhere he went, using his two devilish retainers as his wings. In the course of spending nearly five years this way, his house had fallen into ruin like an abandoned mansion.

There was a reason for this. The rumor that he had executed the maid and sunk her into the well's depths spread from mouth to mouth, until his mansion became widely known as a place harboring supernatural phenomena. It was said that on dark rainy nights, blue will-o'-the-wisps burned above the well curb. It was also whispered that a young maid in a chrysanthemum-patterned furisode could be heard

counting plates in a sorrowful voice. — The servant Osen hastily took leave and fled back to her hometown. Banchō’s Dish Mansion — this eerie name chilled women’s souls, and none would come to serve there. The young retainer Tetsunojō claimed to have seen the ghost’s shadow; even this bold youth turned pale with terror, fell ill, and ultimately fled the mansion. The other Yagorō perished in a brawl. Yojibei the gatekeeper too took leave, fearing the

specter. As male and female retainers steadily dwindled, the dark mansion grew ever more desolate. With none left to properly clean, both rooms and garden were left to ruin until the residence took on the very image of a derelict worthy of being called a haunted house. The seven-hundred-koku samurai mansion seemed to sink beneath a wilderness of overgrown grasses.

Harima paid no heed to rumors

of spectral phenomena. When Tetsunojō claimed to have seen a phantom shadow, he scolded his cowardice from the outset. He was not entirely without regret over Yagorō's death, but what dealt him an even greater blow was losing Gonroku. Gonroku too died in a brawl. He perished in September of 1663, when ambushed by Karainu Gonbei and others at Nihon Embankment — fighting fiercely as rear guard only to be minced like pickled vegetables under

their blades.

This brawl marked the beginning of the Shirahata Group’s downfall. This originated when Mizuno Jūrōzaemon summoned Banzuin Chōbei to the mansion at Shirakawa in Koishikawa and ambushed him in the bathhouse, whereupon Chōbei’s subordinates — under the leadership of Karainu Gonbei, Hanaregoma Shirōbei, and others — had been secretly

awaiting an opportunity for revenge. And so, lying in wait at Nihon Embankment for Mizuno’s group as they returned from sightseeing in Yoshiwara, they suddenly surrounded them. At that time, only Mizuno was mounted. Harima was also present. There were also twelve or thirteen other samurai. Five or six retainers were accompanying. However, the enemy machiyakko numbered fifty or sixty strong, and having been

taken by surprise, the Shirahata Group were locked in a desperate struggle. Moreover, they were drunk on brothel sake, so there were those among them who could not fight effectively. Of course, while the machiyakko side sustained no small number of wounded, in the Shirahata Group as well, nearly a majority were found injured. If the wounded were taken alive by the enemy, it would be a disgrace to the samurai; therefore, Mizuno

ordered them to retreat swiftly.

The samurai left behind numbered no more than seven or eight men, but even so, they fought desperately. Mizuno gnashed his teeth at the thought that showing their backs to townspeople would bring lifelong disgrace, but try as they might, they could not reverse their crumbling momentum. He spurred his horse and fled, fearing capture. Even Harima, who had held out until the end,

finally fled. It was at this time that Gonroku fell in battle. Gonji fortunately survived, but having sustained a deep wound in his left leg, he ended up becoming lame.

Of the two he had relied on as his wings, one had died. The other had been crippled. Harima felt as though his shadow had suddenly grown gaunt. In the already deserted mansion, their numbers dwindled further until only

three remained in desolation — the master, the steward, and a retainer. Shibata Jūdayū had been growing increasingly frail. Gonji could no longer walk properly. The dilapidated house had rotted and tilted, its spacious garden transformed into a den for foxes and raccoon dogs. Then came the time for the Shirahata Group’s destruction. When rumors spread throughout Edo that hatamoto samurai had been routed by machiyakko at Nihon-

zutsumi, even the shogunate could no longer turn a blind eye. The Shirahata Group’s violence had grown intolerable to high officials, with varied discussions about necessary measures — precisely when this incident occurred. The shogunate showed no further mercy.

In March of the following year, 1664, Mizuno Jūrōzaemon was ordered to commit seppuku on the grounds of improper conduct. He met his death

properly in his own mansion.

“The Shirahata Group is finished too.”

This was a collective sigh that burst forth from the mouths of the allies. Harima felt that sorrow most acutely. The Shirahata Group, having lost its head, could no longer prosper as it once had. Moreover, it was completely clear that the pressure from those above against them would grow

extremely strong, leaving them unable to move hand or foot. The destruction of Mizuno had been a warning example directed at us. Having been chastised by this severe punishment, the Shirahata Group had no choice but to naturally disband. Even if it didn’t come to seppuku, we too might sooner or later incur some punishment. We must brace ourselves for at least house confinement. House confinement was a temporary

matter not worth excessive fear, but through these tangible and intangible pressures, the Shirahata Group would meet its end. That fate felt tragic to Harima.

Those who grieved over the Shirahata Group’s downfall were certainly not limited to him alone. However, while the others could leave the Shirahata Group and live respectably, if Harima were to leave the group and abandon his brawling trade,

there would be no path left for him to survive. He who had been numbing the pain of his lost love through nightly brawls — how would he now soothe that ache? When he thought of this, desolation washed over him. Grief tightened his chest. He even wondered whether meeting the same fate as Mizuno might have been kinder. Resentment coiled within him at being left half-alive in this purgatory.

On the evening of the 29th, the funeral of Mizuno, who had committed seppuku on the 27th, was held at the Mita family temple. It had naturally been conducted modestly to avoid provoking the authorities, but even so, many discreetly came to pay their respects. Harima too attended the funeral procession to the temple, his hat pulled low. By the time he returned to the Banchō mansion, a fine rain had begun falling softly on the brim of his

hat. “Lady Aunt Shibukawa has been waiting most anxiously,” said Shibata Jūdayū as he came out to the entrance to greet his master. While wondering why his aunt, with whom he had long been out of touch, had suddenly come to visit tonight, Harima handed his wet hat to Jūdayū and proceeded inside, where his aunt Mayumi sat beneath a dim lamp. Perhaps owing to her spirited disposition, Mayumi appeared as robust in health as she ever had.

“It has been a long time since we last met.” “How time flies — it’s been nearly five years now,” Mayumi said, gazing nostalgically at her nephew’s face. “Perhaps due to some hardship, your face has grown so haggard it’s barely recognizable.” “Or is it perhaps exhaustion?”

Being addressed with such forced kindness was unbearable for Harima in his present state.

He placed his hands on the frayed tatami and apologized for his prolonged silence. “Though I have long desired to inquire after your well-being, Aunt, and that of Iori-suke and his household, being in a state of disownment, I naturally found the threshold too daunting to cross…”

“Of course.” “Once disowned, allowing your presence at the mansion is unthinkable.”
“There’s no need for either of us

to speak of neglect.” “The reason this aunt came intruding tonight is none other — ” Mayumi began, then cast her gaze about the room. “The mansion’s interior has fallen into dreadful ruin.” “Truly, with this state of affairs — a Haunted Mansion through and through — the rumors circulating hold no falsehood.” “To let a seven-hundred-koku estate decay so utterly, even if you’ve wasted away…” “Ah, but physical decay can be rebuilt.” “The ruin of

one’s heart cannot be so easily reconstructed.” “You might presume this aunt has come to berate you anew, but I shall not utter another word tonight.” “As kin bound by blood, there is but one matter I must address — ” “Now, Harima.” “What think you of Lord Mizuno’s seppuku this time?” “Even a man of such fierce temperament appears to cling most desperately to life.”

At her mocking tone, Harima grew slightly impatient. “What

— to cling to life…” “Is it not precisely because he valued his life that he fled from Nihon-zutsumi? No — if he had merely fled that place, an excuse could still be made. If by chance he were to die fighting there, even having his helmeted head trampled by townspeople would be bitter regret… Now, you fleeing together must have been the case as well. But now, as for what came after. I cannot fathom Lord Mizuno’s heart — driven by townsman ruffians,

his comrades wounded, his retainers slain, suffering such pitiful disgrace yet continuing to live shamelessly. Returning to his mansion and immediately committing seppuku… Is that not what a true samurai would do? He clung to life all this time, only to be ordered by his superiors to commit seppuku in the end and have his life taken against his will. What a truly shameful end for Lord Mizuno.”

When told this, Harima too

found himself at an impasse. Mizuno was no coward who clung to life. I am no different. Moreover, his aunt’s reasoning was, for the time being, entirely valid. Resolved that he too must endure being branded a coward, he kept his head bowed in silence, whereupon his aunt began to lecture him earnestly once more.

“Lord Mizuno is a separate matter — what weighs on this aunt’s heart is your

circumstances. Even disowned, you remain dear. Setting aside all past matters, what’s vital now is the prudence to avoid compounding shame — this is why I’ve come to offer my counsel. With Lord Mizuno, whom you trusted as the Shirahata Group’s leader, now perished, you can hardly expect peace. Before official censure falls upon you, why not make a splendid end by cutting open your belly?”

Harima remained silent and continued to listen.

The rain still had not ceased. After his aunt had left, Harima began preparing for seppuku. The night had likely already passed 8pm. Harima set down his brush and gazed at the late-blooming cherry blossoms in the garden — their pale forms scattering hurriedly under the rain’s assault, visible in the lamplight spilling from the sitting room. He was drafting a

suicide note addressed to his superior. Lest he be thought a madman for perishing in silence, he meticulously detailed the circumstances necessitating his death.

Having finished writing, he looked out at the dark garden. The rain-soaked willow hung low over the well's edge like a woman with long flowing hair, its faint shadow trembling. As Harima stared fixedly at it, a bluish-white flame flared up

from the well and immediately vanished. The rain grew slightly stronger, and just as the willow's shadow appeared to sway mightily, the bluish-white flame flared up again. He kept his gaze locked intently. As an icy blue flame wavered faintly, the figure of a young woman materialized like an apparition. A woman with stray locks from her disheveled Shimada hairstyle spilling over her pallid face, clad in a chrysanthemum-patterned long-sleeved kimono -

Harima recognized her instantly as Okiyo. This night marked his first encounter with the ghost of Dish Mansion known throughout the land.

“Kiku,” he called out as he stepped onto the veranda. The will-o’-the-wisp vanished once more, but Okiyo’s figure remained standing there, lingering. Harima called out again.

“Kiku.” “Show me your face.”

The ghost quietly raised her face. It was Okiyo’s beautiful face, unchanged from when she had been alive. It was a beautiful, pure face that seemed to know neither resentment, jealousy, nor curses. Harima found himself smiling involuntarily.

“Kiku.” “Harima will go now too.” The woman’s face seemed to bear a faint smile, but as another strong gust of wind blew in, whipping the willow’s

threads into disarray, her phantom figure was hidden within their tangled shadows. The rain began to fall more fiercely. Okiyo’s soul did not resent him. When he thought this, Harima suddenly felt a surge of strength. In a resolute voice, he called for Jūdayū and Gonji. And then, he revealed his resolve to commit seppuku. “Harima will commit seppuku tonight. “Once you have properly performed your duty as kaishaku, deliver this letter to

the magistrate’s residence.” The downfall of the House of Aoyama went without saying. “Once you have dealt with the aftermath, each of you take a suitable master as you see fit.”

The master gave some money as a memento, but Gonji refused. "I am already a cripple with no purpose in life." "A man once hailed alongside Aoyama’s retainers cannot now become another family’s lapdog." "I will cut my belly in junshi and

accompany you to the afterlife," he declared resolutely. Once he had completed all his duties, Jūdayū said he wished to shave off his white hair. Judging both requests to be reasonable, Harima granted them. The three exchanged a perfunctory water cup ritual. Despite their resolve, there were no tears in anyone’s eyes.

The sound of the rain seeing off spring echoed all the more strongly through the willow

over the well curb. Jūdayū placed the Bizen Norimune short sword upon a ceremonial tray and reverently presented it before his master.